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A PEOPLE'S AIR FORCE: AIR POWER AND AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE,
1945 - 1965

By

Steven Charles Call, Ph.D.

The Ohio State University, 1997

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Central to the rise of American air power was America's cultural fascination with aviation. Just as many Americans ascribed near-miraculous powers to airplanes in general, many also predicted salvation through air power. Interwar figures like Billy Mitchell used popular culture to urge the public to trust air power for national defense, but isolationism and anti-militarism limited success of these efforts. World War II, though, brought unprecedented public support for air power and ended American isolationism. After the war air power advocates continued the popular culture crusade. Using media that average Americans turned to for diversion and entertainment, air power advocates waged a lengthy campaign to convert the American public to their gospel of revolutionary air power.

Capitalizing on public support, air power advocates used speeches, radio addresses, magazine articles, novels, and movies in the late forties to spread their notions that air power had revolutionized warfare as well as human affairs. Initially pointing to an

air power threat that could come from any industrialized nation, air power advocates later identified the Soviet Union as a grave threat against which only air power could prevail. Central to the air power advocates' vision was strategic nuclear bombing. Despite interservice attacks on the reliance on nuclear air power, and international events that prompted calls for greater air defense and tactical air power, air power advocates kept strategic nuclear bombing as the center-piece of air power doctrine and the Strategic Air Command became the predominant force in national defense throughout the fifties. Air power advocates used popular culture to build public support for this predominance, and through much of the fifties maintained a steady barrage of movies and magazine articles that presented SAC as the nation's salvation.

In the late fifties, though, fading fascination with aviation and growing fear of nuclear war ended the public's simplistic faith in air power, and an escalating barrage of anti-air power novels and movies ended the air power advocates' popular culture crusade.

***A PEOPLE'S AIR FORCE: AIR POWER AND AMERICAN
POPULAR CULTURE, 1945 - 1965***

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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1997

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ABSTRACT

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This work is dedicated to the three people who worked almost as hard on it as I did:

Sandra Kay Call, my wife

Jessica Ashley Call, my daughter

Nathaniel Charles Call, my son

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1. Steven C. Call, "Protesting Against Modern War: A Comparison of Issues Raised by Anti-imperialists and Pro-Boers." *War In History* 3 (1) (1996).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 1970 movie *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* depicted a race of mutant humans living in the ruined subway system of a post-nuclear holocaust New York, and in the graphic climax the film reveals that this race of mutants worships a nuclear missile as a god. At the end of the film the leading character, played by Charlton Heston, detonates the bomb which wipes out all remaining life on Earth. Clearly a comment on the Cold War nuclear arms race, the scene is also an indictment of the curious frame of mind in postwar America where millions of Americans placed great faith in nuclear air power to save them from enemy nuclear air power. While the movie exaggerated reality in the name of artistic license, America's faith in air power seemed to carry religious overtones. Moreover, like the mutants in the movie, Americans looked for protection from the very force that threatened their annihilation. This film and other anti-nuclear and anti-air power works conveyed their messages through the medium of images rather than facts, for under certain circumstances images can impart ideas more powerfully than facts. They also turned to images because the faith in nuclear air power that they sought to undermine had itself been built to a great extent on images. For centuries people had imagined that they could obtain great advantage by attacking their enemies from the air, and this speculation

accelerated after the dawn of human flight. In the interwar period, though, proponents of air power began a campaign presenting images in popular culture intended to convert the public to a new-found faith in the warplane. After World War II the campaign accelerated dramatically and for the first time enjoyed tremendous success as large segments of the American public placed great faith in the image of the nuclear bomber as their first line of national defense. This is a study of the popular culture campaign and the images that built that faith in nuclear air power.

American air power was born of a dream, not just at the highest levels of the military and government, but to a significant extent within American society. From the dawn of flight the flying machine excited imaginations in nearly all industrialized nations to an extent that is hard for modern readers to appreciate. This fascination is most clearly evident to modern scholars through its reflection in popular culture. Thousands of novels, poems, movies, and works of art appeared throughout the Twentieth Century extolling the virtues of flight and awakening expectations of deliverance from all manner of ills. Moreover, the popularity of these works hints at a public eager for such images. Those who tell the story of Western society's response to the airplane are remarkably similar in their accounts: human flight unlocked ancient passions that filled popular culture with stirring rhapsodies and eschatological visions. As Joseph Corn and others have shown, the American public embraced the airplane as fervently as any other nation.¹ As in other Western nations, America's fascination soon extended to military uses for the airplane. Thus air power gained a growing hold on American popular culture throughout the

interwar period and into the 1950s. Many Americans saw air power as an integral part of what they believed was a glorious new air age.

Within the context of enthusiasm for aviation and cultural themes proclaiming the arrival of a brave new air age, it is not surprising that some members of society would imagine a revolutionary role for air power just as others were imagining a revolutionary role for aviation in general. Often the same individuals prophesied of a great future for both aviation and air power, for they saw the two as part of the same movement, the same force for change. Those who saw great potential for air power saw themselves as visionaries, prophets who had grasped the ultimate shape of things to come. Air power proponents had reveled in the fascination with aviation in popular imagination, and in that state they had “dreamed dreams and seen visions.” They were often arrogant and ridiculed those who opposed their views because they believed their vision was as inexorable as the tide. Simply stated, the prophets of air power believed the airplane had revolutionized warfare. They often considered armies and navies obsolete, not only because they were too vulnerable to air power, but also because they were incapable of decisive action. Air power, its proponents claimed, could overleap all defenses and strike at the defenseless heart of the enemy nation. Such a blow would be impossible to stop and would quickly paralyze the enemy society, thus delivering the world from the horrors of prolonged warfare by bringing quick, relatively painless victory.

Air power proponents’ dreams of air power revolution and the American public’s fascination with air power are both products of those same yearnings for transcendence in the spirit of Western society that awakened fantastic expectations for aviation in general.

Manifestations of transcendental longings have frequently appeared throughout Western and American history, and their peculiar characteristics reflect the deep and abiding influence of Christianity on Western culture. It is not surprising, therefore, that faith in such ethereal notions as Reason, Liberty, or Democracy have often assumed ecclesiastical trappings and prompt some to talk of the existence of “civil religions.”² While air power was never associated with any form of theology and its adherents never organized into any formal “church,” manifestations of faith in the transcendental properties of air power and attempts to proselytize that faith are reminiscent of religious devotion, and as such constitute something of a civil religion. This is especially true of the most extreme claims made for air power. Like Reason or Liberty, air power was somehow going to lift the human condition to some higher plane of consciousness. For most people, though, the driving force behind faith in air power had nothing to do with esoteric notions of being, it was simply going to deliver the world from the brutal realities of modern war.

Air power advocates did not create the fascination with air power in popular imagination; rather, the public fascination with the flying machine and the reveries inspired by aviation helped to create and sustain the exaggerated expectations for air power in the minds of its proponents and the American public. What air power advocates did do was to appeal to the public’s fascination with aviation and air power in an effort to nurture the public’s expectations for air power and guide those expectations in directions envisioned by the air power advocates themselves. This they did primarily through the medium of popular culture. They returned to the realm of popular imagination to share their dream of

revolutionary air power and try to get the rest of America to share that dream. In short, they sought to make America an air power nation in thought as well as in fact.

Many scholars have examined the development of air power in America, and several have commented on air power advocates' attempts to win support for their cause, but none have specifically studied postwar air power advocates' use of popular culture to build air power support. Nor have they explained America's fascination with air power as reflected in popular culture.³ Those who do consider popular culture focus particularly on the years before World War II, and they fit the popular culture campaign into the political-bureaucratic struggle for air power. According to this view, air power proponents, stymied by government and military authorities, appealed directly to the American people. They "went over the heads" of military and Congressional leaders in an effort to generate favorable public opinion that would then force Congress to vote greater air power appropriations. While this is true on the surface, a closer look reveals that there was more to the popular culture crusade than a public relations campaign.

More specific treatments of some areas of popular culture have at times touched on air power themes but none consider the air power advocates' crusade in its entirety or approach the subject within the context of the imagined revolution. For example, Michael Paris has written perhaps the most penetrating study of aviation films, and while he fits the popularity of air power films into the context of nationalism and the fascination with aviation in popular imagination, he does not identify a campaign to convert the American public to the air power revolution through cinema.⁴ Similarly, H. Bruce Franklin's *War Stars* identifies a cultural fascination with air power in the context of exploring America's

historic fixation on “superweapons” and explores air power advocates’ interwar efforts to sell America on air power through popular culture. Written under the obvious influence of the Strategic Defense Initiative, or “Star Wars,” debate and somewhat polemical in nature, the book largely ignores the postwar air power crusade and focuses instead on the debate over nuclear weapons.⁵ Laurence Goldstein’s *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature* adds many unique insights into how aviation and space flight are reflected in fiction and poetry, but its interwar themes echo Corn and Sherry, while its narrower focus on the postwar period examines a small group of authors and does not touch on the effort to advance air power through popular culture.⁶ Air power themes in other areas, such as radio and television, have remained largely unexplored.

The interaction between air power and popular culture is a critical chapter in understanding the rise of American air power. The early air power proponents were caught up in the eschatological visions that burst forth in America’s popular imagination at the dawn of flight, and these visions spawned a revolutionary dream for air power in the imagination of its advocates, the ramifications of which can be traced into the early 1960s. While Michael Sherry has described the air power proponents’ agitation in the interwar period and its effects on the use of air power in World War II, that chapter in air power history is merely a prelude to the crusade air power advocates launched in popular culture after the war. Relying on obvious manifestations of widespread public support and sympathetic editors, publishers, directors, and producers - in short, those who controlled popular culture - air power proponents dramatically increased their efforts to spread their message after World War II, and for a long period met with a highly receptive audience.

Throughout the late forties and much of the fifties, judging by the wealth and content of material appearing in popular culture, the message presented by air power's champions enjoyed the mantle of "conventional wisdom." That is, the mainstream of America's reading public was confronted with a preponderance of material that presented the air power message with little debate. Thus for the average American, such a barrage would seem to imply that the "best minds" must agree that air power represented progressive military strategy, and any forward-thinking person would see the wisdom and inherent superiority of air power. While many raised arguments against air power's message, those arguments could hardly compete for the public's attention because of the magnitude of exposure the air power message enjoyed at the height of its impact. For example, Marshall Andrews, writing in 1950, complained repeatedly that the public was only hearing one side of the air power debate because newspaper and popular magazine editors would not accept articles attacking air power's capabilities. He further stated that anyone who questioned those capabilities was ridiculed and reviled as anti-modern.⁷

Air power advocates owed the preponderance of their message to the channels through which their message was carried, and this in turn reflects the popularity of their message. While air power's champions certainly worked through "official" publications such as *Air Force* magazine and *Air University Quarterly Review*, as well as numerous aviation magazines, such venues had a limited audience which by its self-selected nature make it less reflective of the larger public. These magazines were in effect "preaching to the converted." Far more revealing, and therefore the focus of this study, is the message aimed at the general public as a whole. Thus by popular culture I mean media that aimed

at the largest audience possible. In writing books, novels, plays, or articles for general interest magazines such as *Saturday Evening Post*, *Look*, *Life*, and *Reader's Digest*, or in making feature films for theaters across the country or shows for network television, air power advocates aimed their message, not at government decision makers or military strategists, but at the general public, the “person on the street.” Furthermore, while such venues sought to be “informative,” they were not “hardcore” news services and were not bound by the same investigative and objectivity standards as were newspapers and news magazines or film documentaries. Thus air power advocates could and did work in images as well as facts, and their images were rarely balanced by opposing viewpoints.⁸

But what makes the general interest media crucial to understanding the interaction of air power and the American public is their target audience and the reason people turned to these media. Feature films, novels, and general interest magazines sought to appeal to the widest possible audience, the mainstream middleclass, and people turned to such media primarily for diversion. By creating appealing diversion, air power advocates drew a large audience that then became captive receptors for the images air power advocates sought to implant. The most bizarre examples of the dichotomy between diversion and air power images came in general interest magazines where stark depictions of nuclear annihilation were sandwiched between fashion articles and the latest installment of *Tugboat Annie*.

Focusing on how air power advocates presented their message through popular culture gives several revealing insights. First and foremost, it tells us what air power advocates wanted the general public to believe. Secondly, it reflects the degree to which shapers of public opinion - editors, producers, directors, and others - thought that air

power needed to be stressed in popular culture or would be popular with the paying customer. This approach also gives, to some degree, an indication of how the public responded to the air power crusade, although one should remember that seeing a movie pitching the strategic bombing message does not mean that the viewer accepted the message or became committed to it. Likewise, subscribers to magazines that regularly ran articles advocating air power themes might not even read the articles, and if they did read them they might not accept the argument. Still, the appearance of such themes in media that depended on paying customers is some reflection of the public mood. Finally, tracing the evolution of themes appearing in such avenues of popular culture indicate how popular culture affected the air power advocates' campaign. As we shall see, larger world events and changing public mood affected how air power was portrayed in popular culture.

Who were these air power advocates? The term would seem to imply a hardcore group of activists who pushed for a singular goal or a set agenda. Looking at the material appearing in popular culture, though, it is clear that this is hardly the case. Air power advocates varied in their commitment to the cause and in the goals they sought. This caveat might best be illustrated by way of an analogy. In our current popular culture the computer has its own group of advocates and enjoys something of the same "conventional wisdom" air power enjoyed in an earlier period. The gamut of advocacy runs from the hardcore computer "zealots" who seem to claim that computers will cure all the world's ills, to those who see computers as an integral part of everyday life in the future and who urge "computer literacy" on everyone as a means of preparation for the future they envision. There are those who shrink back from computers, who point to dangers ahead if

we “go too far” with computers, or who doubt many of the claims made on behalf of the computer. Still, computer advocates have succeeded in convincing a wide segment of the general public that computers can bring great benefits, that computers are a necessary part of modern life, and that progressive, forward-thinking individuals should indeed become “computer literate.” In much the same way, air power advocates ran the gamut from hardcore zealots who made extravagant claims, such as Alexander De Seversky, to those who saw it as an important part of America’s future, such as the editors of *Collier’s*.

In examining advocacy groups there is often a tendency to “round up the usual suspects,” to focus on individuals who might have a vested interest in the issue and then assume that the vested interest motivated their advocacy. Such an approach distorts any analysis of air power advocates and their popular culture crusade. Granted, some were leading figures in the Air Force, and in fact there appears to be no Air Force leader who advocated less air power or a restriction of its mission, but their advocacy stemmed from more than bureaucratic ambition. Certainly anyone in the Air Force who doubted the need for a bigger Air Force or who questioned air power’s capabilities would not get to a position of power and influence in the postwar Air Force, but the messages Air Force leaders consistently put forward in the popular culture campaign indicates that they earnestly believed the air power gospel they helped propagate, and that this belief was part of their motivation in trying to make the American public believe it as well. By the same token, one should not exaggerate the role of Air Force members in the popular culture crusade. Granted, Air Force figures such as Curtis LeMay played important roles in “selling” air power, but they were far out-numbered by civilian figures, many of whom

never had any official connection with the Air Force. Some, like Alexander de Seversky and William Bradford Huie, were an embarrassment to the Air Force and proved counter-productive to air power goals. Similarly some air power advocates were aircraft industry leaders with a vested financial interest in a bigger Air Force. Far more important, though, were the many more civilian air power advocates who had no vested interest in advancing the air power cause. Writers, novelists, journalists, newspaper and magazine editors and publishers, playwrights, screenwriters, movie, television, and radio directors and producers, all played critical roles in spreading the air power gospel, for they decided what the public read, heard, and watched, and they did it with no apparent motive other than that, for a variety of reasons, they each believed in the cause of air power.

The diversity among air power advocates is also seen in what they believed about air power. As in the computer analogy, convictions ran the gamut from extreme to pragmatic, but all believed air power was a force that would shape America's and the world's future. Some made extravagant claims for air power, such as the belief that armies and navies were obsolete except as support units for the Air Force. Others felt it was America's best front line defense in a dangerous world. Some saw air power as an amorphous concept that might best be described as the ability to do in the air whatever one wanted or had to do: bombing, seizing air superiority, supporting ground troops, or exploiting air mobility. Others, though, saw strategic bombing as the primary embodiment of air power. Most agreed that air power was more than just military planes. Anything the nation and society did on a daily basis that furthered the cause of aviation contributed to air power. Along those lines, postwar air power advocates continued the call for

“airmindedness” which began in the interwar period.⁹ Airmindedness was a term widely used from the twenties through the fifties to connote a state of mind that recognized the importance of aviation and sought its advancement. In much the same way people talk about the need to become “computer literate” today, air power advocates spoke of the need to make all Americans knowledgeable about aviation, air power, and the importance of the two. On the whole, though, one cannot speak of the “typical” air power advocate’s view any more than one can speak of the “typical” air power advocate.

This diversity is further complicated by the fact that attitudes toward air power changed over the period in question, both among air power advocates and within popular culture. Over the course of twenty years following World War II a symbiotic relationship developed between air power advocates and the American public which went through various stages. During the early years when America enjoyed a nuclear monopoly, as the Cold War took shape, and as air power advocates focused on maintaining the wartime popular support for air power and building a large peacetime air force, the popular culture campaign stressed themes reminiscent of the interwar period, particularly the revolutionary nature of air power: air power had revolutionized human affairs along with warfare, air power had created a grave threat to America that only a strong Air Force could meet, and strategic bombing would paralyze any enemy’s defenses at their industrial source.

The Soviet’s explosion of an atomic bomb in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 brought changes to the ways air power was depicted in popular culture through the mid-1950s. In response to Soviet nuclear capability, air power advocates, hostages to their earlier success in depicting the lethal power of strategic bombing, now

had to face public realization that Soviet strategic bombers possessed the same deadly capabilities. Some air power advocates debated the value of greater air defenses for North America, but most efforts focused on portraying the Air Force's Strategic Air Command as the best possible shield to deter a nuclear attack on America through the promise of overwhelming retaliation. At the same time, though, the Korean War forced a shift from the earlier exclusive emphasis on strategic bombing to one depicting a broader conception of air power. The end result was a set of conflicting and often contradictory images of air power encompassing overwhelming strategic forces that could somehow stop incoming enemy bombers at their source without launching a preemptive strike, along with powerful tactical and air defense forces able to meet any contingency but which could not stop a concerted nuclear attack on America. This development set the stage for the elevation of SAC in popular culture through the late-fifties that portrayed America's nuclear forces as the only thing standing between America and nuclear devastation.

By the mid-1950s, however, doubts emerged in the popular culture depiction of air power. Air power advocates still portrayed the Air Force as the best possible defense in a hostile world, but other voices questioned the wisdom of massive retaliation as national policy. More important, though, is a subtle but perceptible shift in public mood reflected in popular culture. Joseph Corn has called the fifties the twilight years of America's romance with aviation, and the same seems to be true with its acceptance of air power as a concept possessing unlimited potential.¹⁰ Taking its place by the end of the decade was an image in popular culture that increasingly depicted air power as a malevolent threat. Increasingly air power's image as the best deterrent to war had to compete with the image

of the Mad Bomber, best reflected in Generals Jack D. Ripper and Buck Turgidson in *Dr. Strangelove*, both of whom threatened to plunge the world into a nuclear holocaust.

The importance of the popular culture air power crusade is not just what each individual air power enthusiast said or believed; rather, the importance is in the collective context formed in American culture - that there once was a time when many people, military and civilian, shapers of popular culture and average citizens, firmly believed that air power was not only the shape of the future, but that it carried the promise of a better tomorrow. This context contributed to American society turning to air power for a sense of security through much of the fifties and to America making air power the centerpiece of its defense policy. The fact that at the same time air power was defined and epitomized by LeMay's Strategic Air Command and the threat of nuclear devastation is a stark indicator that popular passions can move in mysterious ways. Only later did the public come to see that, far from offering utopian deliverance, air power actually threatened to be the harbinger of tragedy on an epic scale. This may have been a cruel necessity the democratic West felt constrained to rely on, but for Americans to see it as anything but a cruel necessity was, for a time, an act of mass self-delusion. How this self-delusion came about is the subject of this study.

1. Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance With Aviation, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); for another view of America's response to aviation see Michael Paris, *From the Wright Brothers to Top Gun: Aviation, Nationalism and Popular Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) particularly 108-14. Corn's pioneer work inspired similar studies of aviation's impact on popular culture in other industrialized nations. See, for example, Peter Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), Michael Paris, *Winged Warfare: The Literature and Theory of Aerial Warfare in Britain, 1859-1917* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), and Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1994).
2. For a background and historiography on civil religion in America and elsewhere, see Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* (Winter 1967): 1-21; N. J. Demerath III and Rhys H. Williams, "Civil Religion in an Uncivil Society," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* (July 1985): 154-66; and James A. Mathisen, "Twenty Years After Bellah: Whatever Happened to American Civil Religion?" *Sociological Analysis* 50:2 (1989): 129-49.
3. Much has been written on the development of American air power, but the best overall works are Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), Robert Frank Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force Vol. 1, 1907-1960* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University, 1971; reprint, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University Press, 1989), and Walter Moody, *Building A Strategic Air Force*, (Washington, D. C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996). Two exceptions to the lack of study of American air power and popular culture are Sherry, *American Air Power*, who explores many popular culture themes through World War II, and to a lesser extent, Corn, *Winged Gospel*, who gives only limited attention to military aviation; neither explore the full range of air power and popular culture, and each deals primarily with the period up to 1945.
4. Paris, *Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 6-8, and especially chapters 5, 6, and 7.
5. H. Bruce Franklin, *War Stars: The Superweapon and the American Imagination*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), see particularly chapter 2 for the air power popular culture campaign.
6. Laurence Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
7. Marshall Andrews, *Disaster Through Air Power*, (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1950), xi-xiii, 4, 7.

8. A word on methodology is in order at this point. One of my primary reference sources was *Reader's Guide to Periodic Literature* which catalogs articles appearing in numerous magazines ranging from general interest to specialized. I followed two basic approaches in searching for pertinent articles. First, I searched under such topic headings as "Air Power," "Aeronautics, Military," and "United States - Air Force," for articles dealing with air power topics. Secondly, I searched for articles written by noted air power authors. This method yielded an exhaustive wealth of material. In both approaches, for reasons outlined above, I noted articles listed in aviation-oriented magazines and news magazines, but generally focused on articles carried by magazines known for their mass appeal and primary emphasis on entertainment. Because of the vagaries of topics and categorization as well as the restrictive focus on general interest magazines, I have not attempted a statistical analysis of the frequency of air power articles. In all other categories, such as novels, movies, pamphlets, and television shows, I quite frankly used everything I could find. While computer searches and secondary literature turned up more than I ever suspected, the fact that no study of this kind has previously been attempted left me on my own with few lists of pertinent works in most genre. While there are several good studies of war and aviation movies, there is little on novels and almost nothing on radio and television shows. Thus while I strove for thoroughness and creative approaches to finding more material, I am left with the nagging conviction that there is more out there that I did not find and that some media have been more thoroughly covered than others.

9. Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, chapter 3.

10. Ibid, 138.

CHAPTER 2

PROLOGUE

It seemed to people at the time altogether fitting that something truly monumental in human affairs should arrive so close to the turn of the century. Many within Western civilization felt that the West's advances in science, technology, and culture were only beginning to achieve their potential and that progress was Western civilization's God-given destiny. There were voices of dissent questioning all this progress, but the general mood assumed the West was about to embark on a brave new future that would chart new frontiers. Few, though, expected that one new frontier would include the realization of an age-old dream, the conquest of flight.¹ When the flying machine burst on the scene it captured popular imagination to an extent perhaps unparalleled in history. The dawn of flight seemed to embody perfectly the popular mood of progress. Human reason had shattered one of the most fundamental and age-old limitations of human experience, gravity. Science had opened up a whole new dimension, both literally and figuratively. Popular imagination did not just revel in the new physical freedom, though, for the technological breakthrough was as much an aesthetic experience as it was a physical one. Just as the body could now soar into the heavens and dance among the clouds, so too could the human spirit and imagination.

It is perhaps difficult for modern readers to appreciate how deeply the dawn of flight moved Western imagination in the first few decades of the Air Age. We have grown up with the commonplace reality of aviation, and technology during our lifetime has moved on to new wonders, such as space travel. But historians who have studied the impact of aviation on Western culture are unanimous in their efforts to convey the full magnitude of the cultural forces sweeping Western society and unlocking primordial yearnings and passions. In his history of Europe's early response to aviation Robert Wohl attempts to make his readers feel just how profoundly that earlier generation had been moved, and how different from our own that generation's response had been. In his introduction he writes:

What I discovered both fascinated and dismayed me. Fascinated me because the stories I read equaled or surpassed in high drama anything I had encountered in adventure fiction or mythology. Dismayed me because, though I had been practicing the historian's craft for more than two decades, I now had to acknowledge a major territory of ignorance in my understanding of the recent past.²

To understand the intellectual climate behind the rise of American air power one must grasp the full scope of this cultural fascination. Too often we forget that members of pressure groups are also members of the society they hope to reform. In the case of postwar air power advocates, their thinking was in part shaped by the euphoric cultural atmosphere of their youth when nothing seemed too fantastic to ascribe to the new miracle of aviation. Furthermore, works of early air power advocates, Billy Mitchell and others, which aimed to influence society through popular culture, helped to influence the thinking

of later air power advocates who were part of the interwar target audience. This is not just the story of the military influencing society, but also of society influencing the military.

As members of American society in the early days of flight, those who would later become air power advocates were swept up in the same spirit of aviation euphoria that spurred the public imagination. Just as others were imagining all sorts of fantastic properties for aviation, air power advocates imagined similar properties for air power; just as aviation enthusiasts believed aviation would revolutionize human affairs, air power enthusiasts believed that air power would revolutionize warfare. The two realms were part of the same cultural phenomenon in the first decades after the Wright Brothers' flight.

Rumors of War in the Sky: Air Power Prophecy up to 1903

Long before the appearance of air power advocates, before the first air force was organized, before any efforts to advance the cause of air power, voices within popular imagination speculated about the effects flight would have on warfare. From the start, writers and thinkers anticipated that a great and terrible advantage would go to anyone who could fight in the air. None were specifically advocating air power, but these early voices helped shape an image of the future warbird long before the airplane was invented, and these images influenced society's expectations of warfare once it moved into the clouds. While all predicted aerial warfare would possess overwhelming superiority, they did not always share the same vision of the results of that superiority. Many saw in this imagined superiority a great utopian future: aircraft possessed such inherent advantage over anything on the surface that they would inevitably make existing forces, and war

itself, obsolete. Others saw that this superiority inevitably meant that the airplane would be an “ultimate weapon” of unequaled terror and death, but they were convinced that either some greater good justified that terror or they expressed a fatalistic opinion that whether one liked them or not, their visions were as inexorable as the tide.³ A minority, though, saw war in the air as a cataclysmic terror that would threaten the very fabric of civilization and perhaps the entire human race. While these last voices warned against air power, their voices were overwhelmingly drowned out by the preponderance of those who prophesied of great things to come from the warplane. In the arena of images competing for the public’s attention, it was the optimistic and reassuring images that had the greatest impact on shaping expectations once the airplane emerged as a reality.

This varied interpretation of the prospect of aerial warfare has a long history. After witnessing the first human balloon ascension in 1783 Benjamin Franklin reflected an early utopianism when he speculated that balloons would end warfare. In fact, he based his judgement on arguments that would later become central themes for air power advocates: balloons manned by soldiers could attack without warning anywhere in the enemy’s homeland; no army could be strong enough everywhere to stop such a force; and this force “could not cost more than Five [sic] ships of the line.”⁴ Continuing the utopian vision, in 1852 Tennyson’s “Locksley Hall” depicted “airy navies grappling in the central blue” with such overwhelming superiority that they brought about an era of universal peace and a “Federation of the world.”⁵ As with Franklin’s predictions, this notion of air power ending the scourge of war was a standard theme of later predictions for air warfare.

Others who had seen great advantages to air power also saw that such advantages would come through great destruction, making the warplane hardly an unqualified blessing. During the early 16th century Leonardo da Vinci experimented and speculated on various methods of human flight, in part for its military potential. While he felt that such a weapon would end warfare, he saw that it could only come through a reign of terror but saw little that could be done to stop it:

In truth, whoever has control of such irresistible forces will be lord over all nations, and no human skill will be able to resist his destructive power....no lock, no fortress, however impregnable, will avail to save anyone against the will of such a necromancer. He will cause himself to be carried through the air from East to West and through all the uttermost parts of the universe.⁶

Yet another angle of this rational/utilitarian approach is reflected by Robert Paltock's 1751 novel *The Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins*. The hero stumbles on "a race of winged persons" in Africa. While carried aloft Wilkins uses his gun to establish a small empire and speculates that "truly, had my Countrymen but the [means of flight] to convey their Cannon...from place to place, the whole world would not stand before us."⁷

Others saw nothing but tragedy if war expanded to the skies. In 1759 Samuel Johnson warned of the darker side of war in the air and wanted nothing to do with flying. Writing in *Rasselas*, Johnson warned, "If men were all virtuous...I should with great alacrity teach them all to fly. But what would be the security of the good, if the bad could at pleasure invade from the sky? Against an army sailing through the clouds neither walls, nor mountains, nor seas, could afford any security."⁸

Military figures also saw advantages to attacking from the air, but before the arrival of airplanes, balloons were the only means available. Balloons were used in several

wars in Europe and America before the Twentieth Century, though with disappointing results.⁹ In yet another parallel with later air power predictions, though, the failure of balloon warfare to live up to fanciful expectations did not inhibit speculation in popular imagination: the years leading up to 1903 saw a steady stream of future-war literature predicting an imminent air war revolution.¹⁰

Much of this speculation appeared after 1871 as Germany's stunning victory in the Franco-Prussian War awakened a virtual flood of future-war literature. Cultural changes wrought by the scientific and industrial revolutions, as well as the rise of mass literacy, had helped spur the genre of science fiction, and after 1871 writers' imaginations were further inflamed by nationalistic paranoia and industrialized warfare.¹¹ Fearing an invasion at any minute from any direction, writers across Europe and America imagined all sorts of horrendous weapons that could be turned against them by some terrible "other," and their hopes turned to fantastic weapons that could rescue them from impending defeat. While the future-war literature of this period focuses on all aspects of warfare, much of it speculated on war in the air.

Utopian air power prophecies of the period reflected the over-heated war anxiety of late nineteenth century popular literature, but they were also products of the era's progressive spirit. An example of this confluence of cultural themes can be seen in Simon Newcomb's 1900 novel *His Wisdom the Defender*. A professor and astronomer of international note, Newcomb styled himself an expert on numerous other subjects, and his novel reflects the progressive faith that reason can solve the world's intractable problems. Set in 1941, an American college professor discovers an anti-gravity substance which he

uses to power his fleet of airships. He mounts upon these ships a wondrous weapon of his own invention, and his airships have no trouble disarming the entire world, for as Newcomb writes, “no defence of person or property against an army flying the air where it chose, and pouncing down at any moment, was possible.” The hero forces all nations to submit to the authority of his private corporation staffed by American college students who will direct all human affairs. The hero, rising about nationalism, assumes the twin titles of “His Wisdom” and “The Defender of the Peace,” abolishes war, and oversees a golden age of peace and prosperity brought about by the reign of reason.¹²

By far the most frequent prophecies of air power had little to do with utopian altruism. Instead, numerous authors portrayed air power as a “blessed destroyer,” a miraculous force discovered just in time to save the nation from some overwhelming invasion or other external threat. Air war prophecies of this sort were part of the larger cottage industry of future-war literature that I. F. Clarke identifies, and as such, the relevant point is not that air power stories were more fantastic than stories depicting salvation through bigger armies or better navies, or that air power was depicted as more capable than land power or sea power. The relevance is two-fold. First, even before the first military air units were established, the airplane was connected with romantic nationalism. Clarke identifies two key characteristics that help explain the wild popularity of future-war literature during this period: rampant nationalism and the romanticism of war in Western Civilization before World War I.¹³ Both of these characteristics would become central factors in the cultural popularity of air power in the Twentieth Century, for as Michael Paris has observed, while many have highlighted the international utopianism of

aviation enthusiasts, there was also a strong nationalistic theme throughout Europe and America as patriotic citizens sought to advance their nation and culture through aviation.¹⁴ Furthermore, during this period literary depictions of the airplane and pilot became stock images in the infant film industry, and the film industry made those stock images virtual cultural icons that later air power enthusiasts manipulated.¹⁵ The second relevant point is that even before the airplane emerged as a physical reality in 1903 it was widely depicted in popular culture as a wondrous weapon that would be the salvation of the nation. Long before the writings of Billy Mitchell or other air power enthusiasts, a popular form of literature aimed at the widest possible reading public began shaping an image of the airplane as a savior the people could trust during times when wide-spread nationalistic enthusiasm mixed with nagging nationalistic paranoia.

The examples of this “blessed destroyer” theme are many, but several standard motifs stand out. One that would resonate ominously in the Cold War era was the faith in science and technology to save the nation from the horrors of science and technology. As illogical as that sounds, it was a standard depiction of air power in future-war literature that continued throughout the Twentieth Century. For example, in an era of much talk about the importance of maintaining control of the seas through superior sea power, Stanley Waterloo’s 1898 novel, *Armageddon*, depicts an Anglo-American alliance fighting for its survival against a Russian-led world coalition. The coalition’s strength lies in a vast naval armada, but the alliance is saved by the aluminum “air-ship” invented by an American “technological wizard” which bombs the Russian fleet into defeat. The victors establish Anglo-American-German global hegemony and this great new air power then

rescues humanity from the spiraling horror of war by making war too terrible to contemplate.¹⁶

Another motif which would also resonate into the Cold War era is the depiction of air power as salvation in a world of “good versus evil” or “enlightened versus benighted” external threats. In 1898 S. W. Odell, in *The Last War; Or, the Triumph of the English Tongue*, depicts air power as one of the primary means by which Anglo-American progressivism defeats forever the forces of evil and reactionism led by, again, Russia.¹⁷ Often this sense of external threat was nothing more than racism, which points to a third motif. Across the spectrum of future-war literature one can see a growing acceptance of total war pitting entire civilizations in a fight-to-the-finish struggle for survival. In this context the airplane emerges as a weapon of total war and a means of mass extermination of the threatening “other.” In William Delisle Hay’s 1881 novel *Three Hundred Years Hence* the white races have come to accept “[t]he stern logic of facts [that] proclaimed the Negro and the Chinaman below the level of the Caucasian, and incapacitated from advance towards his intellectual standard,” and that nature had placed the “Inferior Races...outside the pale of Humanity.” With cries of “Death to the Negro! Annihilation to the Chinaman!” the “Caucasian executioners of Destiny’s decree,” using airships called lucegenostats, fly over Asia and Africa showering the land with “a rain of death to every breathing thing, a rain that exterminates the hopeless race” causing the “destruction of a thousand millions of beings who once were held to be the equals of intellectual men.”¹⁸

One of the few works before 1903 warning of the horrors of air war was a 1883 satirical comedy by Albert Robida. Appearing in the French periodical *La Caricature, La*

Guerre au vingtième siècle (The War of the Twentieth Century) presents a warning more about human folly than the terror of death from the skies. In text and illustration his message seems to be that if humans are foolish enough to continue in their present direction, future war will include such horrors as submarines, aerial bombardment, and germ warfare.¹⁹ Robida's work had little or no impact outside France, and there appears to be little of the same vein throughout this period. After 1903 others sensed the danger of air warfare, and the chorus of voices prophesying doom grew throughout the Twentieth Century, but one is tempted to ask why, in the decades leading up to the dawn of flight, no one shared the concern voiced by Samuel Johnson so long ago? Laurence Goldstein has pointed out that throughout the ages, divine and demonic attributes have always coexisted in the mythology and literature of flight.²⁰ Why should the sudden proliferation of air war speculation on the eve of the "air age" be of such an uncharacteristically positive nature? Undoubtedly the rampant nationalism and romanticization of war during this period helps explain the overwhelmingly positive image of air power.²¹ But negative images reappeared between 1903 and the start of World War I despite the continued chauvinistic and militaristic mood, thus one must look elsewhere to explain the lack of negative air power images in the late Nineteenth Century. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that until 1903 human flight was still a fantasy. As long as airplanes remained a distant dream, sceptics could dismiss it as too distant a threat to warrant serious consideration. As long as the prospect of bombs falling from the skies remained confined to the pages of fanciful war novels it did not awaken fears within a society like America that saw no threats on the

horizon. The image of air power, both positive and negative, would begin to change, though, when the airplane became a manifest reality.

An Image in the Sky: Air Power in Popular Culture, 1903-1918

The success of the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk on 17 December 1903 not only ushered in the era of human flight, it also gave futurists a concrete image upon which to hang their visions. More importantly, the dawn of human flight so caught the public's imagination and, especially in America, the airplane became such a powerful image invested with marvelous properties that public imagination became fertile ground for the images spun by futurists and aviation proponents. People around the world struggled to reshape their world-view to accommodate this new miracle in the sky, and for many nothing seemed too fantastic to ascribe to the airplane. Along side renewed predictions of universal peace and harmony wrought by aviation came patently preposterous claims: flying would cure diseases, or, by affecting human evolution, bring about a superhuman species, "Alti-man."²² In this cultural environment of super-heated expectations it is not surprising that wild predictions for the airplane extended into the realm of warfare. As we have already seen, futurists had been predicting a revolution in warfare if it entered the third dimension, and the appearance of a physical manifestation of those visions coupled with the "in the air all things are possible" mentality coursing through popular imagination added new momentum to the prophecies of air warfare.

The outbreak of World War I took aerial warfare out of the realm of fancy and, like the invention of the airplane, gave popular imagination a concrete image upon which

to focus. The overall effect of the appearance of war in the air on the depiction of air power in popular culture was, however, decidedly mixed, and in many respects was less than one might have expected. The reasons for this lack of impact are varied. First, and perhaps foremost, many of those who had previously speculated about air warfare were merely attempting to predict the future, not necessarily urge the adoption of overwhelming air power. When the war broke out, the unexpected totality of war and the magnitude of events overwhelmed many commentators through four years of carnage, and considered reflection of prewar attitudes were generally possible only years afterward. As Gerald Linderman has argued for the Civil War generation, such reevaluation often does not occur for many years after the fighting stops.²³ That the same is true of World War I air power can be seen in the fact that the writings of Billy Mitchell and Giulio Douhet did not emerge until the 1920s. Secondly, actual accomplishments of air power in the war were so ambiguous that one could find enough “evidence” to support nearly any point of view.²⁴

The appearance of the airplane after 1903 and of large scale air warfare after 1914, therefore, focused the trend in speculation about the nature of air power, but by and large the images still remained fanciful when compared with later realities. Utopianists still pointed to a shining new dawn ushered in by the warplane, while others still saw it as a new “secret weapon” that would save their nation from some imagined threat. After a long hiatus, the theme of warning of the potential threat of air war to society reemerged, and it too became a part of the airwar predictions of this period. The real change, though, came from three new cultural factors that involved a new image, a new voice in the air power debate, and a powerful new medium: the romantic air ace, the air power advocate,

and cinema. At the time, these new elements would have limited impact, but after the war all three would play a major factor in shaping the image of air power in popular culture.

For many Americans, the news of the Wright Brothers' flight or their first glimpse of an airplane in flight awakened feelings of awe heavily laden with religious and mystical symbolism. Joseph Corn has stated that the notion of the airplane as a cultural and social redeemer was more powerful and widespread in America than elsewhere. He attributes this to two factors. First, Americans had long been prone to "technological messianism," a vague but long-standing attitude that machines and technology would and could solve physical and social problems. A more important factor to Corn, though, is that America had long felt a strong affinity for religion, often of an evangelical characteristic.²⁵ The airplane touched deep and powerful images within Judeo-Christian heritage: images of the heavens as the realm of God, the angels - and now man. Writing of these technological and religious connections, Corn depicts a cultural milieu in which shades of earthly salvation through technology intermingle with images associated with divine salvation in the heavens, and he portrays America's attraction to the airplane as at once eschatological in scope and tangible in conception: heaven on earth; salvation wrought by the human hand.²⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that images of salvation transferred to the realm of war. Somehow the airplane with its miraculous properties would end the scourge of war or would save America if war came. As we have seen, these images were not new, for Benjamin Franklin, Stanley Waterloo, and Simon Newcomb had all seen salvation of some sort in the gift of flight. But the advent of human flight and its unparalleled cultural

popularity made such extravagant expectations a major part of the popular imagination's view of air power.

Utopian prophecies in future-war literature continued, but with the popularity of aviation, images of a utopian air age entered the mainstream culture. These new depictions followed two general threads of logic. Some felt that the airplane not only lifted one physically, but also mentally and spiritually to a higher plane of reasoning and attitude. In this way the airplane would elevate people's minds above the base motivations that led to war and would usher in feelings of international brotherhood and harmony. Reflecting in 1911 on what recent developments in aviation meant for the prospects of future war, the editors of *The Independent* confidently predicted, "We believe [the airplane] will make for good, it will compact the world with a closer civilization. It creates propinquity, and propinquity begets love rather than hate."²⁷ Furthermore, when looking down on the earth from above people would notice that there were no borders and they would forget their nationalistic passions. This sentiment was captured in verse by Rhoda Hero Dunn in "The Aeronauts," published in 1909:

....And our hearts,
Now islanded by little miles of grass,
And tiny leagues of waving forest leaves
Into dissenting nations, leap to meet
A future wherein unfenced realms of air
Have mingled all earth's peoples into one
And banished war forever from the world.²⁸

The other strain of utopian expectation held that the airplane had made war so horrible that no one would dare contemplate it. In a sense, this is an early depiction of air power as a deterrent to war, and this notion too would resonate throughout the Twentieth

Century. After considering all the terrors that could (and have) become part of air warfare, a 1909 editorial in *The Independent* concluded that:

When war becomes so dangerous to those that take part in it, there will be increased unwillingness to engage in war....A small nation can afford no adequate navy, but it can on short notice equip a thousand airships. This tends to equalize the smaller with the larger powers....The strong powers will be slow to declare war even against a weak power, when the latter can do it infinite harm. The age of aviation may thus be the age of peace.²⁹

The future-war image of air power as a benevolent weapon that forces the world to disarm continued in the vein of Simon Newcomb. Written on the eve of World War I, and serialized in the *Saturday Evening Post* during the early months of the war, *The Man Who Rocked the Earth*, by Arthur Train and Robert Williams Wood, was published in book form in 1915. It depicts a world sunk into devastating but inconclusive war and sliding toward collapse. A scientist invents a nuclear energy beam powerful enough to alter the earth's rotation and destroy entire mountain ranges and mounts it on an atomic-powered "Flying Ring." The scientist calls himself PAX, and "The Dictator of Human Destiny," and forces the nations of the world to disarm completely. Despite PAX's death when his machine malfunctions, the fear prompted by PAX's invention prompts the nations of the world to join together to outlaw all weapons and embark on an era of peace and prosperity.³⁰ In the same spirit, but writing in the midst of the Great War, John Stewart Barney's *L.P.M.: The End of the Great War* portrays another American inventor who uses an anti-gravity aircraft to cow the world's armies and establish a fascist-like world government based on the American corporation and run by "the Aristocracy of Intelligence," which eliminates war by ruling with dictatorial powers.³¹

Those who saw air power ushering in a blissful millennium through peaceful means stood in sharp contrast to those who felt that the airplane would be the “ultimate weapon” that would spell defeat for whatever danger threatened America. These rational/utilitarian futurists continued the romantic image of warfare and air power as the salvation of the nation seen in the earlier period. Between 1903 and 1914 this group’s imagined threats reflected either international tensions or current social concerns such as immigration. After the Great War started, though, the Entente’s propaganda campaign focused much of America’s concerns on Germany, and the futurists’ literature followed suit.³² Throughout the period, however, these rational/utilitarian fantasies remained little changed in theme or content from those that appeared during the earlier period. These tales are noteworthy because they appeared within American popular culture at a time when aviation enjoyed a powerful hold on popular imagination. These airwar fantasies emerged within a cultural milieu that made such predictions seem entirely plausible.

Few nations posed an obvious threat to America before 1914, and consequently future-war literature imagined threats coming from all over the globe. One example of this is Roy Norton’s *The Vanishing Fleets*, published in 1908, in which an unprepared America is confronted with an alliance of Japan, China, and Great Britain. Armed with radioactivity-powered “radioplanes,” an American air force exhibits its awesome power by literally carrying away the British and Japanese fleets, and the whole world submits to universal disarmament under American leadership, and war is abolished forever.³³

Not all imagined threats during this period were of a political or military nature. Many Americans had grown fearful of immigrant “hordes” entering America’s population,

while anti-Semitism and fear of communism had also begun to appear in American society. Despite the extra-nationality of such fears, some saw air power as the nation's savior. A good example of prewar social concerns prompting air war fantasy comes from Jack London, author of *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, and a well known social activist. In 1910 his article "The Unparalleled Invasion" reflected early Twentieth Century concerns with Asian immigration policy by imagining a world threatened by a resurgent China. Helpless in the face of overwhelming numbers, the colonial powers of Europe are saved by American bombers which sow the length and breadth of China with bacteriological bombs. The air power that London extolls amounted to salvation through genocide.³⁴ Small wonder that in the face of later, more visible threats, Americans would accept firebombing and nuclear air power. The image of the airplane as the key to total war had begun to take shape much earlier.

World War I awakened a greater interest in aerial warfare in America's popular imagination and this was reflected in fantasy literature. This is hardly surprising. If air power brought salvation from some imagined threat, one would certainly expect it could do the same for a "real world" threat as well. In fact, here we see an important cross-over from fantasy to reality in air power imagery. While the point may be so natural as to seem obvious, one should contemplate it briefly, for when an imagined scenario becomes an actual event, the predicted course of action must be translated into the current situation. Fantasy literature during World War I, by continuing in the traditions of future-war literature, helped society bridge the gap between air power prophecy and airwar reality. The reality hardly matched the fantasy to be sure, but significantly for later air power

debates, this transitional process started people contemplating why the imagined potential of the airplane had not manifested itself as expected.

The gulf between fantasy and reality in World War I aerial warfare can be seen by looking at one example of fantasy that came out during the war. During the third year of the war, despite Germany's growing frustration at its inability to do more than minimal damage to London with their zeppelin raids, Cleveland Moffett, in *The Conquest of America*, imagined Germany launching devastating bombing attacks on America followed by an invasion of the east coast. American technological prowess responds with an air fleet armed with air-to-surface missiles, and American air power quickly forces Germany to surrender, a feat which, in reality, the allied armies and air forces had been unable to do after three long years of fighting. Air power fantasy did not die in the face of World War I reality; it merely adapted to the new reality and prophesied greater technological wonders that would allow the warplane to achieve its imagined potential. This pattern would continue as part of the air power debate throughout the Twentieth Century.³⁵

While the utopian visionaries saw great benefits coming from air power, and rational/utilitarian futurists felt it could save the nation, some saw nothing but tragedy and potential doom for humanity. The actual appearance of the airplane and air warfare awakened fears of what the warplane might do *to* society, and thus works began to appear warning about the threat of air power. Few of these warnings came from Americans during this period, though, for curiously America's view of the airplane long remained either benevolent or benign. As we have seen, American writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw potential threats, and envisioned air power as a miraculous

defense against these threats. Europeans, on the other hand, were more disposed to seeing the darker side of the warplane. Perhaps the reason for this discrepancy lies, not only in the messianic image of aviation peculiar to America, but also in the fact that the threats some Americans saw were less immediate than those faced by Europeans. Blessed with two wide oceans and peaceful neighbors, Americans could indulge in tales of barely-plausible invasions where air power, like the cavalry of another American literary genre, suddenly appeared on the horizon to miraculously save the day without having to confront the darker implications of such power turned against the American homeland.³⁶ One well known prophet of the dangers of air power, though, had a significant audience in America.

Best known for such science-fiction works as *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine*, H. G. Wells was also a prolific commentator on social trends. While he was surprised at the rapid development of the aircraft, Wells nonetheless quickly perceived what its ultimate potential meant for the human race: every man, woman, and child, and society itself, would become not only targets, but also the focus of air power's destruction. In fact, his first major work on the threat of air warfare, *The War in the Air*, published in 1908, should, in the words of one commentator, be read "as a statesman's manual" in the same vein as Machiavelli's *The Prince*.³⁷ Throughout this work, as well as *The World Set Free*, the message is clear: air power posed a graver threat than did the Martians in *The War of the Worlds*, for now the seeds of human destruction lay in hands of nations and people, not some other-worldly alien; and salvation would not come through some serendipitous microbial counter-attack but only through human foresight.

In *The War in the Air*, all the nations of the world are secretly building vast aerial armadas when a global conflict is sparked by a fleet of German zeppelins bombing New York City. In describing how the world sinks into global conflagration, Wells' insight should have proved valuable food-for-thought to interwar air power theorists such as Giulio Douhet. When the Germans attack, New Yorkers panic at first, and the city's government, paralyzed, quickly capitulates. But while the Germans negotiate with Washington, the populace soon recovers and a guerrilla-style counter-attack breaks out. Even at this early date, Wells sensed a crucial weakness inherent in air power: it could wreak great destruction but it could not occupy the territory it devastated. In the absence of an occupying force, a paralyzed home government would find it hard to enforce whatever will it might have, especially if key government facilities were destroyed or dispersed. As Wells states, "The Germans had struck at the head, and the head was conquered and stunned - only to release the body from its rule. New York had become a headless monster, no longer capable of collective submission."³⁸ The Germans retaliate by initiating "the massacre of New York," but the uprising of the masses forces America to counter-attack. Other nations sense the chance to strike. French and British air fleets attack Germany while Chinese and Japanese air fleets attack all over Europe. Everywhere "the whole fabric of civilisation was bending and giving, and dropping to pieces and melting in the furnace of the war." Thirty years later the world's civilizations have been reduced by unremitting war to "little communities...under the guidance of a medicine man or a priest" fighting for survival against "Panic and Famine and Pestilence that followed in the wake of the War."³⁹

Wells' other significant work in this area, *The World Set Free*, was in many ways even more prophetic. Writing in 1913 Wells envisioned the advent of nuclear energy, including the atomic bomb. Initially used for peaceful purposes, nuclear energy brings about a new wave of industrial productivity and prosperity.⁴⁰ But soon the new energy exacerbates economic competition, and when war breaks out, atomic bombs, borne by aerial bombers, bring the world to the brink of collapse. Out of this comes an ironic vision which Wells intended more as a warning of humanity's only hope than as a utopian prophecy: faced with the specter of atomic extinction, the nations of the world come together to form a world government, the Republic of Mankind, which eradicates war across the planet; the irony rests in the fact that the new world government bases its authority on the use of air power.⁴¹

In almost every category, World War I killed the old nineteenth century romantic image of war. The disappearance of the chivalry and glory of war, in turn, brought fundamental changes to the genre of future-war fantasy literature. War would henceforth be depicted as bringing only death and despair.⁴² This image was hardly suitable for those who envisioned a messianic future for air power, and consequently the future-war fantasy nearly ceases, with one major exception, as a vehicle for air war prophesy. Other venues arose, however, to carry the air power debate into wider circles of discourse. Before the Great War, despite aviation's popularity, the question of air power was a minor issue within popular culture in most respects. Events of the war, though, brought the subject to the attention of more people and ensured that during the interwar period nearly every American would have some knowledge, and opinion, on the ever-widening debate. The

increased use of warplanes throughout the war would have, in and of itself, ensured that air power policy would be a matter of some public debate, but three new elements appeared during this period to place the entire issue, in dramatic and moving images, before every man, woman, and child in America. These three new elements were the heroic fighter ace, the air power advocate, and cinema.

One great exception to the deromanticization of war during World War I was the cult of the air ace.⁴³ In the face of protracted, dehumanizing stalemate, the image of the “knight of the air” served as a public tonic providing something, if in reality very little, for the masses to cheer about. Significantly, the greatest force shaping the cult of the fighter ace was journalism of both the respected and pulp varieties.⁴⁴ Several factors help explain this phenomenon in the popular culture of air power, for example, the need for victors in the midst of stalemate and the longing for a heroic face in a war characterized by depersonalizing technology. But no explanation is complete without considering the long history of romanticizing flight and the more recent technological messianism attached to the airplane. Europeans may not have expected aerial salvation to the extent Americans did, but the universal hero-worship of the ace found in all belligerent nations hints that even Europeans willingly accepted images of superhuman exploits in the air.

Americans cleaved unto the air ace with the same enthusiasm as Europeans, and this romanticization of air war heroes helped to fix the image of the airplane’s messianic potential onto the image of air power. In the eyes of many, the warplane meant salvation from the all-too-apparent evils of modern warfare. As Corn observes, “Americans expressed revulsion at the introduction of new weapons such as machine guns, tanks,

poison gas, and submarines - but not at airplanes."⁴⁵ And no image conveyed the romantic promise of air power to average Americans more than the icon of the fighter ace. Air warfare was seen as the last vestige of chivalric warfare where individual tests of skill and courage epitomized the harmonious melding of man and machine. The enduring image was captured by Eddie Rickenbacker, America's top air ace, in his 1967 autobiography:

Frequently two pilots of equal skill would spend an hour or more fencing in the sky, each seeking to obtain the superior position over the other. When one or both ran low on gas, they would simply give each other a wave and fly back to their respective aerodromes.⁴⁶

The reality of aerial warfare in the Great War was quite different from the mythology. By the end of the war it had become an impersonal war of mass and attrition like that on the ground. But that mattered little to the depiction in popular culture, for the image became the reality despite all evidence to the contrary.

The image of the fighter ace became such a powerful and durable representation of air power in part because of the appearance of a new and potent force in popular culture, cinema. There is an irony in the persistence after World War I of the myth of the lone fighter ace dueling in the skies of America's popular imagination. For fifty years following the end of the Great War American air power increasingly focused on strategic bombing. One reason the fighter ace image remained an icon of aerial warfare is that before and during the Great War the infant film industry borrowed on the lone hero of prewar fantasy and the wartime ace when creating its stock image for aviation and air war films. The stock image was formed early, and once it took shape it was perpetuated as a standard plot motif as the film industry embarked on a long series of films over the ensuing

decades.⁴⁷ More important for this survey, though, is the fact that many of these films embodied the messianic potential of aviation in general and air power in particular, for as Stephen Pendo has observed, “filmmakers have often been pilots and aviation enthusiasts who cared deeply about their subject.”⁴⁸

In their infancy aviation and cinema found a mutually beneficial bond that would last for decades. Filmmakers discovered that filming airplanes in flight provided both the opportunity to stretch their artistic talents and the exciting cinematography that drew audiences. At the same time, early airmen learned the value of publicity in advancing aviation and saw the new technological wonder of cinema as a perfect vehicle for generating public enthusiasm.⁴⁹ Thus cinema became a reflection of, and a catalyst for, aviation enthusiasm in America’s popular imagination. Before World War I American filmmakers joined their European counterparts in producing films that included aviation themes, for example *The Airship or 100 Years Hence* in 1908, and *Drama in the Air* in 1912, but films about aerial warfare appear to be a uniquely British topic.⁵⁰ These prewar films continued the literary emphasis on the lone heroic inventor as opposed to the heroic pilot, but that image changed when the war offered up an image of the air ace as a heroic figure that easily overshadowed the earlier technical wizard image.⁵¹

Cinema during the Great War became a powerful tool for nationalistic propaganda, and in this role helped to transform aviation and air power into symbols of national power and prestige.⁵² In the process it helped to create the mystique of the ace and transformed the image of the star of the aviation film into that of the lone heroic pilot who embodied the best a nation had to offer. Even if the leading character was not actually an ace, the

image was the same; larger than life, acting alone, he prevailed against overwhelming odds. Through newsreels and short features, as well as other media, aces were built up into objects of international fame with each nation pouring out honors that far exceeded what these individuals actually accomplished of military value. This “ace” image readily transferred to the feature film as can be seen in two examples. *A Romance in the Air*, appearing in 1917 and quite popular in America, details the exploits of Bert Hall in the *Lafayette Escadrille*. Playing himself in front of the camera, Hall epitomized the dashing nature of the ace: despite being shot down behind German lines, he still manages to rescue his girlfriend and together they escape through enemy lines.⁵³ The only American example, *Berlin via America*, came out in 1918. In this film an American pilot infiltrates Baron von Richthofen’s flying circus and coordinates an allied bombing raid on Berlin.⁵⁴ Although few air war films were made in Europe and America during the war, the merger of the prewar stock image and the cult of the fighter ace created a conventional image of air power and the airman that would dominate air war movies as the genre grew in numbers and influence after 1918.

With the fairly rapid formation of air force units in military establishments across Europe and America, a significant new group emerged, the air power advocates. Rather than a formal organization with an official membership, this was an unofficial category of people who shared a state of mind. Generally anyone, civilian or military, who envisioned great potential for the warplane and espoused the cause of advancing that potential can be considered an air power advocate. Many different kinds of people found themselves drawn to air power. Obviously one group was military pilots in both the Army and the

Navy. Still another was aircraft industry leaders. Both these groups have been charged with serving self-interests in their support of air power, but as we shall see, while this charge may too often be true it is even more often true that these individuals, judging by their words and deeds, wholeheartedly believed in the cause they espoused.⁵⁵ Perhaps the most intriguing group is the largest, the hodge-podge of writers, journalists, editors, publishers, actors, directors, producers, in short, people in powerful positions to shape public opinion through their work in popular culture. What makes this group so fascinating is that they could gain no obvious personal advantage by embracing the cause of air power. They supported air power because they believed in it.

Air power advocates often held conflicting views, for there was no set agenda or doctrine. To most advocates air power was more than a concept, it was a social force much the same as the most esoteric depictions of sea power; some even affected the habit of capitalizing the term, as Air Power, just as today some insist it be written as one word. Often ardently nationalistic, air power advocates still frequently espoused multinationalist visions of the benefits of aviation. For in a general sense, air power meant to its adherents the ability to do whatever the nation wanted to do in the air; as such it included both military and civilian aviation, and advances in one realm were seen as advances for the whole. In detailing “the winged gospel” Joseph Corn has focused primarily on aviation enthusiasts, those who were most active in civilian forms of aviation, but the distinction between civilian and military realms of aviation are far more apparent today than they were at that time. Both realms saw themselves as partners in a common cause. Aviation enthusiasts emerged slightly before air power enthusiasts, but throughout the ages images

of flying seemed to go hand-in-hand with images of fighting in the air. Thus it is not surprising that shortly after a loose-knit group emerged dedicated to advancing the cause of aviation, another group would emerge dedicated to advancing the cause of air power.

Air power advocates actually did little up through 1918 to advance their cause in the realm of popular culture. Those directly involved with military aviation before and during the war were preoccupied with the more immediate questions of technology, tactics, and survival.⁵⁶ What the public saw on the subject of aerial warfare was more in the realm of fantasy than advocacy. As a consequence, little appeared in the realm of popular culture from air power enthusiasts aiming at convincing the public to espouse and support American air power. Still, caught up in the same excitement for aviation that was sweeping the American society of which they were a part, those who later became prolific evangelists for air power began shaping their larger visions and making their first proselytizing efforts during this period. Henry H. “Hap” Arnold, for example, recalled first thinking that airplanes would be a perfect means of invasion when he saw a painting sometime during his cadet days at West Point between 1903 and 1907 that depicted a balloon invasion of England, and again later in 1909 upon seeing the plane Blériot had flown across the English Channel that same summer.⁵⁷ Later in 1911 Arnold appeared as a stunt flier in two films, *The Military Scout* and *The Elopement*, in an effort to promote the need for American air power.⁵⁸ Arnold later became one of the leading air power advocates in the interwar period and head of the Army Air Forces during World War II. Similarly, in 1907 Benjamin D. Foulois, the Army’s first pilot and head of the Army Air Corps during the 1930s, wrote a thesis as a student at the Army’s Signal School at Fort

Leavenworth in which he made numerous bold predictions on the future use of airplanes and dirigibles in warfare. Having never seen an airplane first-hand, he based his predictions on what he had read about aviation; still, he predicted:

The results of these preliminary engagements between the hostile aerial fleets will have an important effect on the strategic movements of the hostile ground forces before they have actually gained contact....the aerial victory should be an important factor in bringing campaigns to a short and decisive end.⁵⁹

Civilians also began to show an early concern that America needed more air power. At a time when the Army owned only one airplane, Robert F. Collier, aviation enthusiast and owner of *Collier's* magazine, bought a Wright-B airplane in 1910 and loaned it to the Army until they could find money with which to buy more aircraft.⁶⁰ While the air power advocates that emerged in this period did little to proselytize their new faith, they became an important force advocating for air power in popular culture after the world emerged from the cataclysm of World War I.

The Crusade Begins: The Interwar Years

The Great War had done two things relevant to the public's view of military strategy. First, the prolonged stalemate and slaughter of the trenches made a mockery of customary approaches to war. The image of Colonel Blimp became a widespread cultural symbol of what was seen as the bankruptcy of traditional strategies for land warfare. That this image was a simplistic reaction to a complex problem brought on by the evolution of warfare in the machine age is beside the point; many shapers of public opinion believed that the meatgrinder of trench warfare was now an inherent part of modern warfare and

that many generals were too hidebound to accept that old strategies were now obsolete. Secondly, the airplane became a significant, but immature part of war in the machine age. The airplane's contribution in World War I was hardly conclusive. While the warplane was indispensable on land, and a great asset at sea, aviators achieved no significant, indisputable accomplishment other than assisting traditional forces in traditional efforts. Air warfare created exciting images in popular culture, such as the air ace, but it had accomplished too little in the way of concrete contributions to establish any particular strategy as the obvious direction of future air warfare. In popular imagination air power had accomplished enough that people knew it would certainly play a major role in future warfare, but not enough to firmly fix any one image, other than a romantic image, of what that role would be. The ground had been prepared for prolonged debate in popular culture over the future direction of air power, and the American public proved to be a fertile field for the fantastic claims made for air power's potential.

Even without the advocacy work of its partisans, air power would have enjoyed some measure of public support. The interwar years were the high point of America's romance with aviation,⁶¹ and thus all forms of flying generated public enthusiasm and often enhanced the airplane's technological messianic image. Barnstormers crisscrossed the nation bringing the airplane to the hinterlands and sparking grassroots excitement and still more images of the airplane's transcendent powers. Charles Lindbergh recounts one episode during his barnstorming days in 1923 when a Mississippi woman asked him how much he would charge to take her to heaven and leave her there.⁶² Air races and air

shows sprang up in numerous cities and towns, but even more important were the unofficial races for records of higher, faster, and farther flights. Civilian and military pilots competed side-by-side for records, money, and fame, and with each new record the airplane seemed to give further testimony that old limitations, continents, oceans, even time itself, had been swept away by the all-conquering airplane.

The most powerful image of public response to aviation, though, is the reaction to Charles Lindbergh's transatlantic flight. While numerous aviators became popular public figures, the public outpouring prompted by Lindbergh's feat illustrates the extent to which aviation was connected to emancipation and secular spirituality in the public mind. Lindbergh was more than just popular. Clearly he meant more to people than just temporary attraction to a media figure. The immediate and persistent honors, the official and unofficial awards, every painting and sculpture, every poem and sermon coming from around the world and lasting throughout Lindbergh's life attest to the meaning one man's flight had brought to peoples' lives.⁶³ While to the modern reader this may seem a graphic picture of unabashed deification, public attitudes toward the airplane and the machine age, not Lindbergh, shaped this response. Technology had seemed to many a vague lurking menace in modern life. The airplane appeared to possess the potential to counter that menace - the machine that would liberate the human spirit and carry it beyond old bounds. Now the "Lone Eagle" confirmed that potential. Single-handedly he took on both machine and nature and emerged victorious.⁶⁴

The airplane was not a universal religious symbol *per se*, nor was it the only wonder to evoke rapturous imagery. For those in the general public drawn by the

romance of aviation, however, the traditional strains in American culture of technological liberation and evangelical religion combined to evoke a sense that the airplane was a new form of technology, a transcendent marvel, that possessed the potential to overcome old limitations and which opened up a whole new world of possibilities. This sense of the airplane's radical potential, found in varying degrees among members of the general public, was a crucial precursor to the rise of American air power, for it prepared many to accept the claims made for aviation by air power advocates.

The image of the fighter ace in post-World War I remembrance, especially in the hands of Hollywood, also helped to romanticize the image of air power. The gulf between war as it was portrayed in such works as Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Robert Graves' *Goodbye To All That*, and the war described in the such movies as *Wings*, *Hell's Angels*, and *The Dawn Patrol*, is so great that one wonders if all these works came from the same conflict. This discrepancy has gone little noticed. As Laurence Goldstein has observed, the great critics of World War I literature, most notably Paul Fussell, have all completely ignored literature on the air war.⁶⁵ After the war the most potent force perpetuating the romance of aerial warfare was cinema. For several years after the war America was tired of war themes. Few books on World War I appeared, and what few war movies were made did poorly at the box office. But by the mid-twenties war themes reemerged in popular culture.⁶⁶ Michael Paris identifies some thirty movies from this period featuring World War I flying, many of which, significantly, came from a small group of aviation enthusiasts in Hollywood.⁶⁷

The most important of these, *Wings*, which in 1929 won the first ever Academy Award for best picture, is a good example of the Hollywood connection with aviation and air power. The director, William Wellman, a relative unknown at the time, was chosen because he had flown with the Lafayette Flying Corps; the movie was the brainchild of John Monk Saunders, who had flown for the U. S. Army during the war. One of the movie's two stars, Richard Arlan, had flown for the Canadian Royal Flying Corps while the other, Charles Rogers, was a civilian pilot who became a Navy test pilot during World War II.⁶⁸ The movie was made with \$16,000,000 worth of aid from the Army, both because the Air Corps saw an opportunity for good publicity, but also because many airmen knew Wellman from his days with the Lafayette Flying Corps. Before shooting was done Wellman reportedly got "nearly every Army pilot in the country" and some unwelcome Congressional criticism.⁶⁹ Critics agreed the plot was thin, a love triangle, but the flight sequences were the best that had ever been filmed and set standards that still dominate aviation and air war films to this day. More important, though, is the image it sent to American audiences. The film did not preach the air power gospel as later movies would, but the heroes were romantic, dashing, and in their union with their flying mounts they sent the message that the man-machine combination had transcended earthly and traditional military bounds. The warplane looked down on the mud of no man's land, it sent everything scattering when it dove and strafed and bombed. The movie opened only months after Lindbergh's flight, thereby benefitting from the attention the "Lone Eagle" had brought to aviation, and was met with critical acclaim and record attendance, thus giving air power the public boost Saunders and the Air Corps had wanted.⁷⁰ Almost as

important as popularizing air power to the general public is the fact that films such as *Wings* helped inspire thousands to embark on flying careers. Beirne Lay, who later went on to command a B-24 bomber group in World War II and wrote numerous air power novels and movie scripts, including the novel and movie *Twelve O'clock High*, claimed that *Wings* so excited him that he saw it four times in rapid succession in 1928 as a sophomore at Yale, and that the film led directly to his becoming a pilot in the Air Corps.⁷¹

Hell's Angels continued Hollywood's powerful role in popularizing air power. Howard Hughes had two real loves in his early days, movie-making and flying. His film *Hell's Angels* combined the two, for his goal in making the movie was to "glorify and perpetuate the exploits of the Allied and German airmen of the World War."⁷² Hughes gathered around him a staff that included several aviation experts and buffs. Director Luther Reed was also the *New York Herald*'s first aviation editor, and advisor Ted Parsons had been an ace in the Lafayette Escadrille.⁷³ Once again, the action centers around the daring exploits of pilots who wage a noble battle up above the senseless slaughter on the ground, and as with *Wings*, the movie was phenomenally popular with American audiences. One unique feature of the film was its depiction of bombing. Later the notion of bombing as air strategy took on considerable importance in America, but in the 1928 to 1930 timeframe when this film was made most Americans considered bombing civilians morally repugnant. In light of the ongoing debate, therefore, it is significant that the movie depicts ruthless Germans launching a zeppelin raid on London while the two American stars confine their bombing to ammunition dumps. The movie thus helped condition American audiences to accept the carefully crafted image of the 1930s and early

World War II years that city bombing was something other nations did while Americans carefully, and precisely, confined their bombing to legitimate military targets.

The Dawn Patrol, on the other hand, is noted for its depth of plot and depiction of the brutal reality of World War I aerial warfare. As with *Wings* and *Hell's Angels*, the film's genesis and production involved men with flying backgrounds and service as World War I pilots. The initial story came from a short piece written by John Monk Saunders, who had played a central role in the development of *Wings*. The film's director and guiding spirit was Howard Hawks, who became one of Hollywood's leading aviation filmmakers and who had flown with the U. S. Air Service in the war.⁷⁴ The plot centers on Allied pilots and the impersonal slaughter of the one-sided war of attrition they faced in the 1915 phase when Germany had the Allies technologically outgunned. Unlike *Wings* and *Hell's Angels*, the flying sequences are secondary to the plot.

Did the movie's popularity counteract the romantic and transcendent image of the fighter ace prevalent in popular imagination up to this point? No, and for several complex reasons. First, *All Quiet on the Western Front* and several quick imitations had dissipated some of the "war is slaughter" shock value, and the plot portrays pilots as professionals who submit to their collective fate.⁷⁵ In this latter theme the film is a precursor to such post-World War II films as *Twelve O'clock High* and *Command Decision*. Secondly, and more important, one must avoid making too much of simple characterizations of interwar America's attitudes toward air power. Throughout the period American attitudes were in a state of flux shifting between the romantic and technological messianic images embodied in "the winged gospel" and the cult of the fighter ace on the one hand, and traditional

isolationism and anti-militarism on the other. In this milieu of conflicting images individual Americans varied both in comparison to one another and within their own mind, in where they stood in the spectrum between rejecting and embracing air power over the course of time between 1918 and 1941. In effect, with so many competing images to choose from, Americans could and did pick and choose images that seemed to fit how each individual felt about the immediacy of external threats. When the threat seemed remote, as in the postwar disillusionment of the early twenties, they might see air power as exciting, threatening, or overblown. When faced with the reality of World War II and the memory of trench stalemate, they tended to choose the image of air power as the great deliverer and minimized images of the costs of aerial warfare.

Many more films about the Great War in the air appeared throughout the interwar period, but none matched the impact or stature of these three classics. *Wings*, *Hell's Angels*, and *The Dawn Patrol* were seen by millions and set standards for later films about aviation and air warfare that are still influential, and the movies helped to shape images of air power in American popular culture. More important for shaping those images, though, was the air power debate carried out in print. The Hollywood figures whom we have discussed, unlike filmmakers of a later period, were not openly advocating any particular air power policy. After World War I, however, the air power advocates emerged as a vocal group dedicated to advancing the cause of greater American air power and sought to win the American public over to their cause through the medium of popular culture.

In the wake of the Great War numerous people in Europe and America who were familiar with military flying began to articulate what they saw as the inherent potential of

using the airplane in warfare. There had been considerable speculation and prophecy in the past, but the interwar theorists presented something different. They based their predictions on experience, they thought they were objective, they tried to be systematic, but more importantly, they felt it essential to press their ideas on the people, governments, and military organizations of their countries. These prophets theorized about strategies of aerial warfare, but even more, they tried to fit their theories into an overall grand vision of warfare, what they came to call air power. The central vision of these advocates was that armies and navies were powerless to stop the warplane, which therefore left an enemy's real source of military might, its cities, people, and industries that supported the war effort, naked and defenseless in the face of air attack. By striking directly at the enemy's means and will to fight, air power theorists felt they could bring cheap and easy victory.⁷⁶

At the time this suggestion was in many ways a radical departure from standard military thinking. Traditional strategies in land warfare emphasized defeating the enemy army and capturing enemy territory, but did not specifically target the populace. Additionally, air power advocates' claims that the airplane could by-pass traditional defenses and swiftly destroy the enemy's ability or will to fight flew in the face of orthodox interpretations of what World War I trench stalemate and the power of defensive firepower meant for future warfare. Furthermore, the ultimate implication of air power theories was that armies and navies were obsolete. Finally, this notion of the use of air power was contrary to both the orthodox army air war doctrine, which focused on air observation and support of ground troops in combat, and the public's image of the romantic fighter ace. Rather than aiding the ground battle with close air support or

dueling for glory with enemy “knights of the air,” the air power advocates’ theories envisioned air warfare as bombing the enemy’s heartland. The ensuing popular culture campaign focused as much on selling the military and the public on strategic bombing as it did on the “revolutionary potential” of air power.

The air power debate took place in Europe as well as America, and several European theorists had considerable impact on American air power theorists. The first to develop such theories were two Italians, Gianni Caproni and Giulio Douhet. Caproni, an aircraft designer and manufacturer, had an immediate impact during the war, as several of his writings advocated concerted bombing efforts against enemy targets and reached the highest levels among Allied decision makers. One measure of his impact on American policy during the war is that John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, sent Caproni a personal note after the war thanking him for his help.⁷⁷ Douhet’s influence, although difficult to measure, had a more lasting impact. A controversial air power theorist during the war, Douhet was court-martialed and imprisoned in 1917 for criticizing Italian air policy.⁷⁸ After the war, Douhet spelled out his theories in a two-part work, *The Command of the Air*, published in 1921 and 1927. The initial volume constituted the first systematic plan for a war-winning bombing campaign, and claimed that a fleet of bombers, striking the enemy’s cities with high explosive and incendiary bombs and poison gas, would drive the enemy to surrender or collapse in a matter days.⁷⁹

Two other early bombing advocates came from Britain. Commander of Britain’s Royal Air Force from its creation in 1918 to 1929, Hugh Trenchard influenced American thought more through personal contact. While Trenchard focused on bombing industrial

and transportation targets, he also emphasized the psychological effect such bombing would have on civilian populations.⁸⁰ The other British theorist was B. H. Liddell Hart. An army captain during World War I, Liddell Hart became one of the leading strategic thinkers during the interwar period. He is best known for his theories on tank warfare, but he made one foray into the realm of air power with his slender volume, *Paris: Or the Future of War*.⁸¹ While Liddell Hart echoes Douhet, he made more of an immediate impact by reaching a wider audience.⁸²

These four figures heavily influenced America's early thoughts on air power. One of the most visible proponents of air power in America was William "Billy" Mitchell, who served as Assistant Chief of the Air Service from 1919 to 1925. Mitchell had little contact with aviation until 1916 when he became deputy head of the Army's tiny aviation section. He soon learned to fly in his spare time and took on the cause of advancing military aviation.⁸³ In March 1917, on the eve of America's declaration of war, the Army sent him to France as an aeronautical observer. While it is difficult to determine who had the greatest impact on Mitchell's thinking, or when his theories first crystallized, he clearly was impressed by Caproni, Douhet, and Trenchard, and he first started forming his ideas during these early months as an observer.⁸⁴ Mitchell was convinced the airplane had supplanted all other forms of warfare and that the only way his vision of air power would ever come to fruition would be through changing public attitudes. With that end in mind, in 1924 he began writing articles and books aimed at as wide an audience as possible. Mitchell felt bombing gave air power revolutionary potential and that modern war against an industrial nation made its entire population a key element in the war effort.⁸⁵

Recognizing that the public was not ready to accept such offensive plans, Mitchell did not at first write publicly about strategic bombing, but nevertheless urged the Army to accept it and prepare for it.⁸⁶ In a series of tests conducted between 2 June and 21 July 1921 off the Virginia coast, Mitchell shocked the Navy, and a host of other observers, when a group of Army aircraft under his direction sank several surrendered German warships, most notably the reputedly unsinkable battleship *Ostfriesland*. Frustrated that the Army and Navy did not immediately come around to his way of thinking, Mitchell three years later detailed the bombing tests and outlined his grand vision of air power in a series of articles in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Mitchell's conclusion on the sinking of the *Ostfriesland* was emphatic: navies are obsolete, for aircraft can sink any ship with ease and air power can perform the Navy's mission better.⁸⁷ Mitchell went even farther and stated that in the air age "the destinies of all people will be controlled through the air." In the future airplanes would bomb cities with high explosives and tear gas, industries would collapse, and the nation that struck first with its air fleet would win a complete victory: "an attack from an air force...may cause the complete evacuation and cessation of industry.... This would deprive armies, air forces, and navies, even, of their means of maintenance."⁸⁸ The following year, at the height of his court-martial publicity, Mitchell spelled out these ideas in fuller detail:

To gain a lasting victory in war, the hostile nation's power to make war must be destroyed - this means the manufactories [sic], the means of communication, the food products, even the farms, the fuel and oil and the places where people live and carry on their daily lives.... Aircraft operating in the heart of an enemy's country will accomplish this object in an incredibly short space of time....⁸⁹

The infamous climax to Mitchell's career demonstrates the influence of his theories on the air power debate. In 1925 Mitchell was court-martialed for slanderous comments made about his superiors. On 5 September, in response to two recent air crashes, Mitchell released a press statement railing against what he called "the incompetency, criminal negligence, and almost treasonable administration of the National Defense by the Navy and War Departments." One measure of Mitchell's stature in the public debate on air power was that President Calvin Coolidge personally pressed the charges against Mitchell. With Mitchell being the most public air power advocate, many at the time felt the court-martial was really a trial of his ideas and of air power itself. In a legal sense, this notion is clearly false. More important, though, Mitchell's critics realized they could not prosecute even such a blatant act of insubordination without dealing with Mitchell's arguments. Despite the clearly defined legal issue facing it, the court-martial elected to hear a lengthy debate on the pros and cons of Mitchell's theories. While the court-martial remained officially a trial of Mitchell's actions, the courtroom debate of his ideas tacitly acknowledged the unofficial question in many minds: did Army and Navy resistance to new ideas on air power justify Mitchell's comments? Whether Mitchell's theories were right or wrong, though, he was clearly guilty of the charges leveled against him and on 17 December the court convicted him of insubordination.⁹⁰

The court-martial sentenced Mitchell to five years suspension without pay, which Coolidge amended to five years suspension at half-pay. Mitchell resigned from the Army in protest. His campaign to change public attitudes toward air power, though, brought some of the results he desired. First, and foremost, it focused public attention on his

arguments in a way congressional hearings could never do and to a greater extent than did his magazine articles. Secondly, it helped bring institutional changes, albeit minor, to the Army's air forces. Third, the trial gave air power advocates a martyr. The perception that Mitchell had been crucified for his air power theories crystallized those ideas for many air power advocates, and added a personal sense of poignancy to their belief that they were part of a revolutionary movement. Parallels with past figures who had suffered for their faith or for a cause were inescapable and powerful.⁹¹

Mitchell's resignation in 1926 freed him from the constraints of public office. Afterward, he spelled out his ideas in even more graphic language. For example, in an article published by *Collier's* in 1928 Mitchell stated that the essence of modern war was bombers and missiles carrying toxic gas, cities rendered uninhabitable, and nations thus reduced to impotence. Moreover, he issued a stern warning that America was unprepared to fight in this arena.⁹² As Mitchell's depiction of air power became more graphic and shocking, though, his public following fell away. The public had found his early ideas acceptable for they were primarily defensive. His later expressions, however, were too offensive for a nation firmly committed to isolationism and anti-militarism. His 1930 book *Skyways* sold poorly, and he found it increasingly hard to get articles accepted for publication throughout the remainder of his life.⁹³ Clearly Mitchell's offensive-minded strategies had outpaced American sentiments, but as a new war loomed larger by the end of the decade and into the next, more and more Americans would come to not only espouse many of his ideas but to reflect his enthusiasm for those ideas as well.

At the time of Mitchell's trial, many other Army fliers shared his views of air power's potential. While recognizing that Mitchell was clearly guilty of insubordination, Arnold nevertheless testified for him and later stated that most Air Corps pilots saw the court-martial as a trial of air power. Arnold continued circulating Mitchell's ideas in the following months, and only escaped a court-martial of his own in 1926 by the direct intervention of the Chief of the Air Service, Mason Patrick. Even Foulois, who disliked Mitchell vehemently and carried on a running feud with him dating back to World War I, agreed with Mitchell on air power's revolutionary capabilities. After his resignation, though, Mitchell fell out of the mainstream of evolving air power theory in America which later developed in directions he had hardly anticipated. In the final analysis, Mitchell's significance lies not in his ideas, but in what he represented to the faithful followers of the air power gospel at a time when they needed a heroic role model who embodied their perceived revolution: visionary prophet, fearless crusader, selfless martyr. Mitchell became the image that reassured air power advocates that they too should persevere in the face of all obstacles, doubters, and critics. This dogged perseverance, though, also blinded air power advocates to flaws and limitations in their theories. Two examples illustrate the enduring legacy of Mitchell's image: on the eve of World War II the Air Corps dubbed its B-25 aircraft the Mitchell bomber, and in 1955, in a much more favorable political and cultural climate, latter-day air power advocates redeemed Mitchell and his theories in a cinematic paean, *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell*.⁹⁴

Army fliers were not the only ones extolling the capabilities of air power. In 1924 Samuel Taylor Moore made one of the first mass-audience appeals for greater American

reliance on air power. Writing in *Harper's Magazine* Moore described the airplane's ability to inflict great damage on cities and industry through bombing with high explosives, incendiaries, and poison gas. After a lengthy survey of aviation improvements around the world, Moore summed up by concluding simply, "Control of the air mocks all forms of defense in other wars. The only effective weapon against aircraft is more aircraft."⁹⁵ The next year, in an effort to get America to improve its air arm, famous aircraft designer Igor Sikorsky warned in an article published by *The Independent* that New York City was vulnerable to a devastating surprise bombing attack from aircraft refueled and reloaded at sea by pre-positioned naval vessels. In describing the panic and paralysis that would follow such an attack, Sikorsky sounds remarkably like Wells in *The War in the Air*, but there are two key differences. First, Sikorsky states in considerable detail why America's navy could not stop such an attack, and that the effectiveness of air power to launch long-range attacks of this nature proves that land forces are no longer the "backbone" of a nation's defenses. Secondly, Sikorsky's warning was not meant to shock the world into abandoning air power as Wells had hoped to do; quite the contrary. Sikorsky hoped to shock America into adopting air power as its first line of defense and to nurture it through a comprehensive program meant to encourage civilian and commercial aviation.⁹⁶

The air power image advanced by Mitchell, Moore, Sikorsky, and other air power advocates was not immediately or easily accepted in America's popular imagination. Others pointed to the same images but characterized them as an impending tragedy that America should resist, not embrace. In 1923 *The Nation* published M. W. Royse's two-part article, "The Next Air War." In part one Royse lays out a sober prediction of what

future air war would be like based on the record of bombing in World War I, the rapid pace of technological development, and the expansion of air forces throughout the world. He then calls for strong international moral sanctions against all forms of bombing against any target in the second installment.⁹⁷ Another voice of warning came from Stuart Chase in 1929. In his view, air power in the shape of the bomber was so potent that a small air fleet, using explosives and poison gas, could inflict such death, destruction, and panic that it could bring an entire nation to its knees in as little as two hours.⁹⁸ These two examples point to an important aspect of the air power debate running throughout the twenties and thirties. Opponents and proponents of air power were each trying to sway public opinion through popular culture and each group relied on similar images to convey its message. In fact, compared to Mitchell, Moore, and Sikorsky, Royse's warning seems almost tame and overly technical. Michael Sherry has stated that the American public's image of air power during the twenties was shaped more by civil aviation, and thus bombing remained in its eyes a benign force.⁹⁹ The popular culture approach of those on either side of the air power debate suggests otherwise. With the both sides using similar graphic depictions as they competed to shape the public's image of air power through mass media, one could hardly call the American public uninformed on the warplane's brutal power. In the long run, the unanimous agreement between its advocates and critics that air power possessed such destructive potential may have helped the American public accept air power and strategic bombing with unexpected enthusiasm when war loomed in 1941.

The air power debate continued into the 1930s as images of air warfare crystallized and more and more made air power synonymous with bombing. Despite the image of the

fighter ace popular in movies, during the interwar period many people who theorized about air warfare, including most air power advocates, had come to view the bomber as the basic air weapon. All other types were variants from the standard. Note that Mitchell, Moore, Sikorsky, Royse, and Chase had all based their images of air power deliverance or disaster on the airplane as bomber. This conception is comparable to the army's view that the infantry is the fundamental basis of land warfare, and the long-held naval view that the standard warship was the battleship.¹⁰⁰ This distinction is not a trivial one, for it highlights how strongly the bombing advocates who arose in the Air Corps actually believed their theories. One point overlooked by scholars studying the rise of American strategic bombing is that many of the leading figures in developing, advocating, and implementing America's bombing doctrine, men such as Arnold, Spaatz, Eaker, and Hansell, had spent either much or most of their World War I and interwar careers as "fighter jocks." At a time when these men could have benefited by perpetuating the myth of the fighter ace and when most within the Air Corps considered fighter pilots superior and all other pilots, they were the key actors elevating bombing to the central position in Air Corps strategy.

Within the Air Corps, doctrinal evolution moved American air power inexorably in the direction of bombing. A key factor in this development was the Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS) which had evolved into a hotbed of air power theory. As one historian observed, it "proved to be the only common location of experienced Air Corps officers who had enough time for creative thinking."¹⁰¹ Officially, it was just a training school. Unofficially, though, the ACTS served as an influential "think tank" and catalyst that built grassroots support for its emerging strategic bombing theories throughout the Army flying

community. All faculty members certainly read Mitchell's works, but some point to other figures, such as Douhet, who also influenced their thinking. By the end of the twenties the faculty had begun to give considerable thought to how air power could independently win wars, and since most of them shared the view that the bomber was the basic air weapon, their thoughts turned to bombing strategy.¹⁰²

As it emerged during the thirties, daylight precision bombing, as the doctrine was called, expressed great faith in the ability to both paralyze any nation's ability to wage war and to minimize civilian casualties. Assuming that any industrialized society, especially one mobilized for war, would have certain key industries upon which several other industries depended, the ACTS theorists believed that destroying a select number of key targets would have a magnified effect on the enemy's entire economy and paralyze their ability to wage war.¹⁰³ Finding and destroying these key targets placed an emphasis on accuracy, which would also minimize bombs falling on civilian areas around the target. Significantly, this emphasis on bombing accuracy was a marked departure from Douhet's theories and Mitchell's post-court martial writings. Emphasizing bombing accuracy also played into cultural images of American technical superiority and frontier marksmanship. Both images would help "sell" strategic bombing to the American public when the time came to employ the strategy in war. From the ACTS the doctrine of daylight precision bombing radiated out to the whole Air Corps. The school preached this new gospel to every student who went through its program until, by the start of World War II, nearly every Air Corps officer had attended the ACTS program.¹⁰⁴

The conception that air power was synonymous with bombing was even shared by those who opposed air power or questioned its advocates' claims, and they spoke out in popular culture during the thirties. For example, in 1932 Arlington B. Conway, in an article published by *The American Mercury*, took on the notion that bombing cities would be devastating and decisive. He concluded that targeting civilians would be ineffective. Little significant damage would be done and the passions of the masses for war would be inflamed. Air power would still remain a terror, in his view, but the only other application Conway could envision was that bombers would seek out and focus on more lucrative, that is military, targets. In effect, while he opposed the proliferation of air power, he reached the same basic conclusions as the theorists at the ACTS.¹⁰⁵

In addition to those who opposed air power on moralistic or pacifistic grounds, others made forays into popular culture questioning the military efficacy of exaggerated claims made by air power advocates. Often these individuals had military experience in either the Army or the Navy. One early example is Major Thomas R. Phillips, U. S. Army. Writing in a 1933 *Saturday Evening Post* article, Phillips refuted many of the claims made by figures such as Mitchell, and argued that air power, especially the bomber, was merely the glamourous "pinch hitter" who made a limited contribution, but that well-rounded military forces were needed for an overall team effort.¹⁰⁶ In the same category, but more prolific, was another Army major, George Fielding Eliot. Author of numerous articles and books, most notably *The Ramparts We Watch* and *Bombs Bursting in Air*, Eliot was widely respected for his wisdom, balance, and lack of military partisanship. Commenting on *Bombs Bursting in Air* in *The New Republic*, John Chamberlain stated that the book's

subtitle might well have been “Common Sense About the Possibilities and Limitations of the Airplane in War.”¹⁰⁷ In explaining the views of military men like Phillips and himself toward air power, Eliot states that they are not hostile toward air power, they merely “seek rationally and objectively the true place of the airplane in warfare.” Most officers in the Army and Navy, according to Eliot, realize that the airplane is a formidable weapon, but they are convinced that its “true place” is within a balanced military force structure.¹⁰⁸

By the mid-thirties, and through the end of the decade, just as strategic bombing was becoming entrenched in the Air Corps, international events arose which cast an ugly shadow over the public image of air power. In places like Guernica, Nanking, and London aggressor nations like Germany, Italy, and Japan used bombing against cities and civilian populations, and created an impression conveyed through mass media that air power was a brutal weapon of mass slaughter. The most common reaction in America and around the world was a combination of outrage at the perpetrators and admiration that the victims continued to resist. Ironically, a good example of this comes from two *Collier’s* articles written by Winston Churchill. Voicing outrage at Fascist bombing in the Spanish Civil War, Churchill pointed out that Republican morale was nevertheless holding strong and they continued to mount effective resistance.¹⁰⁹ The irony is that later under Churchill’s leadership the R.A.F. would put much of their effort into the same form of bombing that Churchill had decried and claimed was ineffective. Some did not take so long to reach the conclusion that turn-about was fair play. W. B. Courtney, a prolific champion of aviation and air power, wrote in 1937 of the “bestiality” of bombing in Spain and warned of some necessary precautions to minimize casualties, but by 1939 his views had changed.

Reflecting on the air war in Spain and China he commented on how well it worked despite Fascist and Japanese handicaps. Democracies like America, he warned, needed to catch up and learn how to do it better than the dictatorships.¹¹⁰

Yet another interpretation of interwar examples of bombing was that they had been conducted stupidly. In *The New Republic* in 1937 Jonathan Mitchell stated that Fascist bombing of such cities as Guernica was, in the view of American commentators, totally unnecessary as it served no military purpose. Moreover, it was counter-productive in that it stiffened Spanish morale.¹¹¹ Similarly, Thomas R. Phillips stated that bombing Madrid had been a waste of effort and equipment, in part, because the bombs used had been too small to effect any real damage.¹¹² One obvious implication of this line of thinking was that better bombers and better strategy could yield the results air power advocates had predicted. After observing the Battle of Britain, both Arnold and Spaatz concluded that Germany had missed a golden opportunity through faulty bombing doctrine. Arnold's characterization is revealing: "it was not...in any way a display of Air Power."¹¹³

One peculiar twist to the air power debate in the late thirties relates less to bombing and more to the advocates' claim that the airplane had made navies obsolete, but the end result was to encourage the public to see the Air Corps as America's premier service. Many who saw little need for American involvement in another foreign war or an offensive military strategy saw the bomber as the perfect weapon to repel invasion in the Western Hemisphere. No less an authority than Hanson W. Baldwin, Annapolis graduate, former naval officer, military correspondent to the *New York Times*, and frequent critic of air power, claimed that America should concentrate on bombers for hemisphere defense.¹¹⁴

Echoing this same sentiment, others, such as Jonathan Chamberlain writing in *The New Republic* and Francis Vivian Drake writing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, felt that because heavy bombers were all America needed for defending against invasion, building anything else was part of a plot to drag the U.S. into the war in Europe.¹¹⁵

What then was the dominant image in the mind of the American public as it stood on the brink of war in 1941? The cinematic image of air power as romantic and heroic still held powerful sway, as one can glimpse from Beirne Lay's 1937 account of his quest to become an Air Corps pilot, *I Wanted Wings*. Extolling the excitement and trials of his crusade, Lay even included a "how to" guide for anyone wanting to follow his example.¹¹⁶ The public's view of bombing, which seemed to most people to be the future direction of air power, was decidedly mixed. The positive image stressed the technological superiority of the Air Corps and its equipment even though as of mid-1941 strategic bombing had not won official Army approval as *the* Air Corps doctrine. In its 23 May 1938 edition, *Newsweek* showcased the Air Corps' ability to find and sink ships at sea and to bomb targets on land. And in October 1939, with war underway in Europe, W. B. Courtney crowed about America's pilots and warplanes, particularly its precision bombing.¹¹⁷ But the negative treatments of bombing could actually inspire support for bombing. Too often, as in Churchill's and Courtney's cases, images of Nazi brutality through bombing could be interpreted later as justification to give the enemy a dose of his own medicine. Some, for example John Chamberlain, made this point explicitly.¹¹⁸ Or as in Jonathan Mitchell's depiction of Fascist bombing in Spain as stupid and inefficient, one could reach the conclusion that technologically superior American precision bombing would bomb

much more efficiently and humanely. How, for example, was the average American supposed to interpret one of the most shocking images of bombing to appear in popular culture before the war, Pablo Picasso's painting *Guernica*? With no text to guide the viewer one could walk away with either a disgust at the method or an urge to do the same to the perpetrator. Too often images in the public's imagination encouraged the latter.

The anger and thirst for revenge present in American society in the opening days of the war tapped a latent support for air power and together they unleashed an unprecedented level of public enthusiasm for the air war. The latent support was in part a product of the popular culture campaign waged by the air power advocates, but also in part a result of America's passion for aviation and the technological messianism embodied in the airplane. One indication of latent public support is found in survey data gathered by Gallup polls on the question of increasing the armed forces in the years leading up to World War II. The polls generally indicate a majority opinion that all forces should be increased, but the majority favoring an increased air force was consistently and markedly higher. In 1935 48% favored higher Army appropriations as opposed to 11% favoring smaller appropriations and 41% feeling they should remain the same. For the Navy the figures are 54%, 11%, and 35% respectively, but for air force appropriations the figures are 74%, 7%, and 19% respectively. This support was bipartisan and held generally the same percentages across all geographic regions.¹¹⁹ In January 1938, on the question of whether the U. S. should build larger forces, 74% favored a larger Navy, 69% favored a larger Army, but 80% favored a larger air force.¹²⁰ By November 1938, shortly after the Munich Conference, the percentages had increased across the board to 86%, 82%, and

90% respectively.¹²¹ Asked the same question in late September 1939, after the start of the war in Europe, the figures were 88% for a larger Navy, 86% Army, and 91% air force.¹²² The question does not appear to have been asked again before America entered the war, perhaps because the U. S. had begun increasing its forces.

The latent support for air power, though, had been held in check throughout the interwar period by isolationism and anti-militarism. Once those were swept away by the passions evoked by Pearl Harbor, the latent support surfaced and air power seemed to many to be the perfect weapon. Moral qualms could easily be mollified by faith in the technological wonder that would allow America to bomb efficiently and humanely, both wonderful progressive images, not brutally and clumsily as enemy nations had done. The technological superiority image was reinforced by the messianic image. The airplane would deliver American soldiers from the repetition of World War I slaughter that many expected. When daylight precision bombing became official doctrine in late 1941 and the Air Corps began selling its “pickle barrel bombing,” and after America entered the war buoyed by images of Pearl Harbor, the public embraced strategic bombing with an enthusiasm surpassing even Air Corps leaders. This support continued even after it became clear that U.S. bombing was neither as accurate nor as humane as predicted.¹²³

World War II

World War II saw America’s latent support for air power transformed into overt support. Across the country people joined in the goal to fill the skies with warplanes, and

one of the most popular images of the war was one of bombs raining down on Hitler and Tojo.¹²⁴ One of the most striking and pervasive manifestations of the enthusiasm for air power in popular culture can be seen in magazine advertisements throughout the war. Pick virtually any issue of *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, *Collier's*, or any other general interest weekly and one will note that a favorite visual image for tying into war themes was the airplane. Warplanes or air power subjects were used to pitch everything from cars to refrigerators to radios to tires. Even ads depicting ground or naval forces frequently showed an airplane in the sky overhead.¹²⁵ Another eloquent testimonial to the public's expressed faith in air power was the response to Gallup poll questions on the issue of air force independence. In July 1941 42% favored independence, 33% opposed it, and 25% were undecided. By August 1942, 44% of respondents claimed to be familiar with the issue and of those 57% favored independence while 27% opposed it and 16% had no opinion. By July 1943, apparently the last time the question was posed, of those familiar with the question 59% favored independence and 41% opposed it.¹²⁶

Leaders of the Army Air Forces (AAF), as the Air Corps was known after June 1941, sensed this increased public support but worried that it would die out when the war was over. They therefore strove throughout the war to advertise wartime exploits as a means of building greater public support for air power *after* the war. For example, in 1943 the AAF conducted a study of its Public Relations Officers (PROs) posted with field units around the world and concluded that the AAF was missing a golden opportunity to ensure postwar public support for air power because its PROs were too poorly chosen and trained to get AAF exploits into the news. In a cover letter to the report addressed to the

Chief of the Air Staff, Assistant Chief of the Air Staff for Intelligence Brigadier General Thomas D. White stated: “the mission of the Army Air Forces during and *after* war...will depend largely on public opinion (including the effect thereof upon higher authority) based upon unconscious reactions to published accounts of AAF activities over a period of time.”¹²⁷ White referred to the report’s synopsis which spelled out the point more fully:

Air Power has had its opportunity...to demonstrate the truth of everything that has been claimed by its adherents.... If the general public...comes to understand what Air Power is and what it can do, there is every likelihood we will maintain after this war an air establishment adequate for the nation’s security. On the other hand, if the present widespread misunderstanding is permitted to spread, it seems most likely that war-made public convictions will ensure...a public decision to junk the Air Forces and rely chiefly on increased naval power. Such a policy, of course, could cause defeat in the next war, under certain circumstances.”¹²⁸

Air power advocates’ efforts to shape and exploit popular support during the war is a well known phenomenon which has received considerable analysis, but several topics bear brief examination in the context of this study.

As late as 1941 AAF leaders Arnold and Eaker were telling the public that AAF strategy relied on industrial bombing at night, and they describe in great detail how they would achieve pin-point accuracy despite bombing in darkness.¹²⁹ In the summer of 1941, though, when Roosevelt asked the military for force requirements if America went to war, the AAF presented a far different picture. To project and justify AAF requirements the newly formed Air War Plans Division (AWPD), made up of former ACTS instructors, developed a comprehensive plan built around their concept of daylight precision bombing. AWPD-1, as the plan was known, took only nine days to develop, and when approved, with little dissent, it effectively made the ACTS bombing concept official AAF doctrine.¹³⁰

Thus when the war began and the AAF suddenly found overt public support for air power, it began publicizing as its main strategy a doctrine perfectly suited to the image of bombing which the public was most prepared to embrace: technologically sophisticated, efficient to the point of appearing scientific, and humane in its emphasis on precision. One early example of the AAF's effort to win popular support for its bombing methods was the 1943 movie *Air Force*, a feature film which was seen by millions of movie-goers and which received generally favorable reviews. The film was directed by Howard Hawks, a World War I Army pilot and director of *The Dawn Patrol*, and AAF leaders played a central role in shaping the movie from start to finish. Arnold had consulted with Jack Warner, of Warner Brothers Studios, about the film at its inception and remained personally involved at various stages, and AAF technical advisor Captain Samuel Triffy helped mold the central concept and write the script.¹³¹

The film not only depicts the heroic exploits of the crew of a B-17 in the opening days of the war, it elevates the image of American technical superiority and bombing accuracy to absurd levels. In one scene, according to the script, the crew drops only three bombs but sinks one cruiser and two transports. At the same time the gunners shoot down three out of six Japanese fighters before they are themselves forced to crash-land. In the movie version the bombing was cut out to heighten the dramatic effect of the final battle scene, but the gunners shoot down seven out of nine planes.¹³² While the public did not see this first display of bombing prowess, it illustrates the image Hollywood and AAF leaders wished to convey to the public. Later, in the climactic battle scene the crew joins a larger force attacking a Japanese fleet and drops three salvos of bombs sinking one tanker,

one transport, one destroyer, and an aircraft carrier while shooting down three more Japanese fighters.¹³³ In the film version the other aircraft decimate the enemy fleet, and nearly every bomb dropped scores a direct hit. The film's final scene, set later in the war, depicts the crew as part of the out-numbered "hardy band" who established the tradition of heroism, technological superiority, and operational excellence being followed by the AAF's million-man air force.¹³⁴ The message to the public in 1943 was clear: the performance of that early crew became the standard upheld by all AAF crews around the world. This was the image the AAF wished to convey to the American public, but theirs was not the only voice preaching air power through the medium of popular culture.

Another major effort to popularize air power during the war was the campaign waged by Alexander P. de Seversky who reiterated much of the technological excellence and operational efficiency messages, but who also raised dichotomous images quite out of keeping with those stressed by the AAF. Born in Russia, de Seversky grew up around airplanes and became an ace and a war hero flying for the Tsarist Navy during World War I. After the Bolshevik revolution he emigrated to America, where during the interwar years his skill as an aeronautical engineer and aircraft designer led him to found the Seversky Aircraft Corporation in 1931, but de Seversky's poor managerial skills led to his ouster in 1939 and the firm became Republic Aviation.¹³⁵ De Seversky's greatest interest, though, was in popularizing air power. In 1921 he met Billy Mitchell and soon became one of his disciples. By the outbreak of World War II de Seversky had become a prolific author of numerous articles and radio broadcasts aimed at winning Americans of all ages to the cause of air power.¹³⁶ Early in 1942 de Seversky recapitulated the ideas he had

spelled out in such magazines as the *American Mercury*, *Reader's Digest*, *Look*, and *The Atlantic Monthly* in a book entitled *Victory Through Air Power*. Using the events of World War II up to that date, de Seversky argued that air power had become the decisive element of modern warfare both on land and sea. More importantly, though, he applied the industrial bombing ideas of Mitchell and ACTS theorists to the wartime situation and argued that only through air power could Germany and Japan be defeated without costly, prolonged, and bloody war. Yet another air power advocate was promising America that air power and strategic bombing could deliver it from the horrors of World War I-style trench warfare.¹³⁷ But de Seversky's message also contained a disturbing, and as events turned out, foreboding element.

In a chapter entitled “Possession or Elimination,” de Seversky observed that air power was merely the latest step in the long march of military evolution that made warfare more capable of destruction. He concluded that while air power in theory gave the wielder great latitude to choose between the two extremes of possession or elimination, that is, “whether the purpose is to destroy the enemy or to capture him, whether the prey must be killed or trapped alive,” in reality other factors often forced the choice regardless of the wielder’s desires.¹³⁸ For example, de Seversky states: “The deeper the civilization and the national pride of a people, the more likely it is to be subjected to the method of extermination, since such a people cannot be reconciled to living the life of the vanquished.”¹³⁹ De Seversky describes this process of elimination as, “the elimination of the country as a world factor,” where its people are “reduced to impotence beyond easy recovery, through the annihilation of the industrial foundations of their life,” and observes

that “the very ease with which a machine-age country can be blasted into chaos from on high is an invitation to the war of annihilation.”¹⁴⁰ After considering all the factors he felt were pertinent to the strategic situation of war with Germany and Japan, de Seversky concludes that in both theaters, “American strategy must be geared for the war of elimination - which is as good as saying war predicated on superior air power.”¹⁴¹ In short, de Seversky advocated using air power in a war of annihilation against Germany and Japan to sink both countries into long-term chaos and impotence.

De Seversky’s message came across most powerfully, however, when Walt Disney decided to give de Seversky a wider audience by turning the book into a feature-length movie. A self-described aviation enthusiast, Disney claimed to have concluded earlier that air power held the key to victory in World War II and felt that educating Americans about air power through the film was an important civic duty.¹⁴² The film set de Seversky’s ideas into Disney’s characteristically impressive and effective images, but those images conveyed the dichotomous nature of de Seversky’s view of bombing in ways both subtle and overt. In numerous instances throughout the film, bombers are shown high overhead raining bombs down indiscriminately on enemy cities below, but when the illustrator gives the audience a close-up view of the scene on the ground, only factories are destroyed, reinforcing America’s faith that their bombing is almost miraculously accurate.

Less subtle is the macro view of the effect of such bombing. The film goes into depth in describing the Allies’ military dilemma because Germany and Japan possessed interior lines of supply which connect distant outposts to the industrial cornucopia of the empires’ heartland. When focusing on the German situation, the lines of communication

are depicted as a spoked wheel out of which come a steady stream of military hardware. Surface forces could not stop this flow, but bombers striking at the industrial heartland choked off the supply. This image was graphically rendered for the audience by showing fewer and fewer weapons coming out of the pipelines, thus allowing the ground forces to smash through the wheel's rim. This was a fairly innocuous depiction emphasizing the military nature of the bombers' targets.

When the scene switched to Japan, however, the imagery is of an octopus with outstretched tentacles grasping far-flung territory throughout the Pacific. No military hardware is shown. American air power is symbolized as a bald eagle tearing and ripping at the octopus' head until it is torn to shreds and the tentacles shrivel in lifelessness. Beyond the racist element of depicting a European adversary as an innocuous wheel while an Asian adversary appears as a creature widely regarded as loathsome and even evil in nature, there is a military dichotomy as well. The geometric imagery is very similar between the two depictions, and the description of similar tactics leading to similar results could easily lead the viewer to conflate the two images as one. In both cases, bypassing outposts to strike at the life-sustaining center leads to easy America victory. The trouble is that the methods are depicted as both antiseptically efficient and ruthlessly destructive. This dual view of air power was all the more significant because it had such a big impact on the American public. An estimated five million Americans read *Victory Through Air Power*, and a Gallup poll claimed that between his book, articles, radio broadcasts, and the Disney movie, over 20 million Americans, or one out of every six, were familiar with de Seversky and his theories.¹⁴³

In terms of America's actual experience in conducting its bombing campaign in World War II - at times striving for and achieving remarkable accuracy against critical and vulnerable industrial targets, at other times indiscriminately firebombing entire cities - this dual imagery is remarkably accurate, but that is not the imagery the AAF leadership wished to convey to the American public. Throughout the war, then, it seems that two images of American air power and the AAF's bombing campaigns coexisted side-by-side. During the war military and civilian leaders tried to hide or minimize the growing practice of bombing civilian targets,¹⁴⁴ but this does not tell the whole story of public perceptions of American bombing, for other voices also projected images of air power that proved quite popular with the public. De Seversky's popularity disseminated darker images that meshed with passions generated within the American public by the war to create a public mood advocating bombing enemy cities and civilians.¹⁴⁵ Anxious for revenge and desperate to shorten the war and save American lives, the public was willing to use any weapon that promised to accomplish these goals, even if it meant adopting methods that only a few years earlier would have sparked moral outrage.

Images in popular magazines not only reflected this bloodlust, but to a certain extent helped to shape it. A *United States News* pictograph on the eve of Pearl Harbor extolled America's ability to bomb Japanese cities, which it points out were comprised of "rice-paper and wood houses," while a wartime *Life* magazine pictograph depicted a blanket of bombers a mile wide and 117 miles long. These and other examples conveyed more of an image of brute force than precision in American air power.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, articles appeared throughout the war conveying the message that enemy cities and civilians

were being bombed, and they conveyed the message in an unmistakably positive manner. For example, only one month after General Curtis LeMay's devastating firebombing raid on Tokyo, *Collier's* carried a story about the development of America's incendiary bombs and how they were being put to use in Japan. The celebratory text makes it clear that the incendiaries are burning homes and causing large numbers of civilian casualties. The accompanying illustration shows a highway leading to a city engulfed in flames. By the road is a signpost labeled "U.S. Route 40" leading from Utah to Tokyo.¹⁴⁷ Government leaders recognized the power of public sentiments for bombing, and it was one of the factors leading them to adopt civilian bombing.¹⁴⁸

America had entered World War II with unparalleled public support for air power shaped by a long tradition of fascination with the airplane and images of its technological messianism, both of which were reinforced by promises made by air power advocates in their crusade to convert the public to the "air power gospel." Officially, American air power, centered around strategic bombing, was depicted as humane, efficient, and progressive. This was the ACTS tradition of precision bombing. Other images which had pre-dated the war and which stressed the brutal and destructive side of air power, the tradition of Douhet, reemerged during the war and they too made a major impact on the public's perception of air power. Both images coexisted throughout the war and became potent forces shaping the popular imagination of air power. Significantly, both images promised America salvation through air power. The "Dr. Jeckel" image, the tradition of the ACTS, was most prominent early in the war and would remain a powerful tradition in the postwar popular culture depiction of air power, but Hiroshima and Nagasaki fixed the

“Mr. Hyde” image, the tradition of Douhet, most dramatically in the public’s imagination of air power. In fact, to most Americans the atomic bomb had most clearly delivered on the messianic promise of air power in World War II. The public’s support for air power remained strong after World War II, as is dramatically illustrated by a poll conducted during the last months of the war by *The Saturday Evening Post*. When asked which of the three services they felt was most important to national defense 56.3% stated the air force was, while 21.8% said the Navy, and 13.6% favored the Army.¹⁴⁹ This faith in air power was built in large measure by the twin traditions of bombing that became such potent public images and by public perception of what air power had accomplished during the war. As air power advocates strove to maintain and increase that public support in the postwar era they continued the tradition of appealing to the public through popular culture, and they continued to stress the old promises of national salvation through air power. In doing so, they relied heavily on their faith in strategic bombing as progressive and efficient, the ACTS tradition, and its more appealing peacetime images, but the reality of nuclear weapons and the emerging Soviet threat in the Cold War meant that the tradition of Douhet would become an inevitable part of American air power. Trying to reconcile both traditions in a peacetime popular culture crusade forced the air power advocates to shape some awkward and contradictory images for the popular imagination. For awhile they were remarkably successful despite the contradictions, but ultimately the contradictions brought air power advocates frustration, and in the end, failure.

1. For *fin de siècle* cultural trends in the context of technology and war see, for example, Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1983) and Roland N. Stromberg, *Redemption By War* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1982), respectively. For popular attitudes toward aviation before 1903 see Tom D. Crouch, *A Dream of Wings: Americans and the Airplane, 1875 - 1905* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981).
2. Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*, 1.
3. H. Bruce Franklin has suggested this “ultimate weapon” theme in a Twentieth Century American setting, but I see it stemming from older and broader antecedents; see *War Stars: The Superweapon and the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 85.
4. Benjamin Franklin to Jan Ingenhousz, 16 January 1784, quoted in Franklin, *War Stars*, 81.
5. Quoted in *ibid*, 82.
6. Laurence Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 24-30; quote, 30.
7. *Ibid*, 50-53; Robert Paltrock, *The Life and Adventures of Peter Wilson*, Christopher Bentley, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 293.
8. Quoted in Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature*, 42.
9. Lee Kennett, *A History of Strategic Bombing* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1982), 1-10.
10. Two works giving a fairly exhaustive analysis of literature on air warfare leading up to 1903 are Franklin, *War Stars*, especially chapter 2, and I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763-3749*, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), especially chapters 1-4.
11. Clarke, *Voices*, 1-3, 9-14, 48.
12. Simon Newcomb, *His Wisdom the Defender* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1974), 5-11, 45-51, 59-64, 192-97, 295-98, 316-21, 326-29; Franklin, *War Stars*, 48.
13. Clarke, *Voices*, 9-14, 59-61, 111-12.
14. Paris, *Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 4-6.
15. *Ibid*, 8, 18-19.

16. Franklin, *War Stars*, 32-33.
17. S. W. Odell, *The Last War: Or, the Triumph of the English Tongue* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1898); for Odell's depiction of the longterm struggle between progressivism and reactionism symbolized by the showdown between the Anglo-American alliance and Russia see, for example, 66-75; for a depiction of airships and American technology and ingenuity helping to turn the tide of the climactic battle see 151-53.
18. William Delisle Hay, *Three Hundred Years Hence; Or, A Voice From Posterity* (London: Newman and Co., 1881), 235-36, 237, 247-48, 256.
19. Clarke, *Voices*, 81-83.
20. Goldstein, *The Flying Machine*, 44-45.
21. Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1987), 3.
22. Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance With Aviation, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 29-42.
23. Gerald E. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 266-97.
24. Many good works have examined the air war in World War I, but two excellent overviews are Lee Kennett, *The First Air War, 1914-1918* (New York: The Free Press, 1991) and John Howard Morrow, *The Great War in the Air* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).
25. Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, 44, 46-50; Corn credits the phrase "technological messianism" to Victor S. Ferkiss, *Technological Man, the Myth and the Reality*, (New York: Braziller, 1969), see Corn, 155, note 42; for another example of a new technology's sociological and cultural impact on Europe and America see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
26. Corn, *Winged Gospel*, see especially chapters two and three.
27. "The New Annus Mirabilis," *The Independent* 70 (5 January 1911): 55-56.
28. Rhoda Hero Dunn, "The Aeronauts," *The Atlantic Monthly* 103 (May 1909): 617.
29. "The Age of Aviation," *The Independent* 67 (15 July 1909): 155.
30. Arthur Train and Robert Williams Wood, *The Man Who Rocked the Earth* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1915), 3-7, 11-12, 24-26, 55-59, 172-74, 186-88, 224-28; Franklin, *War Stars*, 51.

31. John Stewart Barney, *L.P.M.: The End of the Great War* (New York: Putnam, 1915).
32. Franklin, *War Stars*, 45.
33. Roy Norton, *The Vanishing Fleets* (New York: Appleton Press, 1908), 4-5, 94, 98-101, 205-21, 242-64, 319-42.
34. Jack London, "The Unparalleled Invasion," *McClure's Magazine* (July 1910).
35. Cleveland Moffett, *The Conquest of America: A Romance of Disaster and Victory* (New York: Doran Press, 1916), see particularly 301-05.
36. Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, 44-46.
37. Goldstein, *The Flying Machine*, 65-67.
38. H. G. Wells, *The War in the Air* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1907, 1908): 201-04, 205, 211.
39. Ibid, 210-12, 213-20, 238-41, 351, 376-79.
40. H. G. Wells, *The World Set Free* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1914): 51-54.
41. Ibid, 171-74, 185-89, 196-97.
42. Clarke, *Voices*, 136-37.
43. Much has been written about the cult of the air ace; for concise, perceptive analyses see: Kennett, *The First Air War*, especially chapter 9, and Goldstein, *The Flying Machine*, chapter 5.
44. Goldstein, *The Flying Machine*, 89.
45. Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, 11.
46. Edward V. Rickenbacker, *Rickenbacker: An Autobiography* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967): 106.
47. Paris, *Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 8, 18-19, 45-46, 50-53.
48. Stephen Pendo, *Aviation in the Cinema* (Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1985): vii.
49. James H. Farmer, *Celluloid Wings: The Impact of Movies on Aviation* (Blue Ridge Summit, Penn.: Tab Books, 1984): 7-8; Paris, *Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 10-12.

50. Paris, *Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 10-14.
51. Ibid, 19.
52. Ibid, 25.
53. Pendo, *Aviation in the Cinema*, 70-71.
54. Paris, *Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 32.
55. DeWitt S. Copp, *A Few Great Captains: The Men and Events That Shaped the Development of U. S. Air Power* (McLean, Va.: EPM Publications, 1980) is a good place to start for the efforts of early military fliers in support of air power, but it should be used with caution - many historians consider it little more than thinly-veiled hagiography; for early aircraft industry leaders Wayne Biddle, *Barons of the Sky* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991) is informative and much more balanced.
56. Sherry, *American Air Power*, 9-10.
57. H. H. Arnold, *Global Mission* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 1-4.
58. Paris, *Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 22; Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 8.
59. Benjamin D. Foulois, *From the Wright Brothers to the Astronauts: The Memoirs of Major General Benjamin D. Foulois* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968), 43-46.
60. Ibid, 82; Arnold, *Global Mission*, 28-29.
61. Corn, *Winged Gospel*, 30.
62. Charles A. Lindbergh, *The Spirit of St. Louis* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 447.
63. Goldstein, *The Flying Machine*, chapter 6; Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, 18-25; Lindbergh, *Spirit of St. Louis*, 503-30; Donald E. Keyhoe, "Seeing America With Lindbergh," *The National Geographic Magazine* 53 (January 1928).
64. Corn, *Winged Gospel*, 25-26.
65. Goldstein, *The Flying Machine*, 75, 78-79.
66. Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts and Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1978): 15-16, 24-25.
67. Paris, *Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 35.

68. Ibid, 35.

69. Pendo, *Aviation in the Cinema*, 74; Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 32-36, 41.

70. Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 38-40.

71. Beirne Lay, Jr., *I Wanted Wings*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937): 1-3.

72. Paris, *Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 37.

73. Pendo, *Aviation in the Cinema*, 85; Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 47.

74. Pendo, *Aviation in the Cinema*, 97-99.

75. Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 62-63.

76. The evolution of air power theories and doctrine has received considerable scholarly investigation. A short list of good works includes: Sherry, *American Air Power*, particularly chapters 2 and 3; Kennett, *Strategic Bombing*; Thomas H. Greer, *The Development of Air Doctrine in the Army Air Arm, 1917-1941*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: USAF Historical Division, Research Studies Institute, Air University, 1955; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1985); and Robert Frank Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force Vol. 1, 1907-1960* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University, 1971; reprint, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University Press, 1989), particularly chapters 2 and 3.

77. Frank P. Donnini, "Douhet, Caproni, and Early Air Power," *Air Power Historian* (Summer 1990): 49.

78. Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, translated by Dino Ferrari, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1942; reprint, Washington, D.C., Office of Air Force History, 1983), vii-viii.

79. Ibid, 20-23.

80. Alfred F. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell: Crusader for Air Power*, (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1964), 25-26; Kennett, *Strategic Bombing*, 51, 75-76.

81. B. H. Liddell Hart, *Paris; or, The Future of War*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1925); the title is an illuminating play on words: in the *Iliad* Paris found Achilles' strategic weakness, and defeated his enemy with one blow.

82. Greer, *Air Doctrine*, 19-20.

83. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell*, 20-21.

84. Ibid, 21, 22-25, 31-32, 75; for difficulty in determining the source and timing of Mitchell's ideas, see especially 168-69; Donnini, "Douhet, Caproni," 50.

85. Greer, *Air Doctrine*, 17.

86. Ibid, 44-45.

87. See particularly William Mitchell, "Aircraft Dominate Seacraft," *The Saturday Evening Post* 198 (24 January 1925) for details of bombing tests, and "How Should We Organize Our National Air Power?" *The Saturday Evening Post* 198 (14 March 1925): 6 for conclusions.

88. William Mitchell, "Aeronautical Era," *The Saturday Evening Post* 197 (20 December 1924): 3-4.

89. William Mitchell, *Winged Defense: The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power - Economic and Military* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1925, 1971), 126-27.

90. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell*, 101-05; Both Greer and Futrell suggest that the Morrow Board and its report were timed to preempt an investigation by the House Subcommittee on Aviation, but that investigation had been on-going since the previous year. The timing with Mitchell's court-martial and the publicity it generated seem to support Hurley's contention; Greer, *Air Doctrine*, 28; Futrell, *Ideas*, 48.

91. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell*, 104-09; Arnold, *Global Mission*, 119-22.

92. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell*, 110-12; William Mitchell, "Look Out Below!" *Collier's* (21 April 1928): 8-9, 42.

93. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell*, 120, 123, 131-35; William Mitchell, *Skyways: A Book on Modern Aeronautics* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1930).

94. Arnold, *Global Mission*, 120-22; Edgar F. Puryear, *Stars in Flight: A Study in Air Force Character and Leadership* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1981), 18-19; Foulois, *From Wright Brothers*, 44-46, 197, 223, 225; Futrell, *Ideas*, 51-53.

95. Samuel Taylor Moore, "A Bargain in Preparedness," *Harper's Magazine* 148 (May 1924): 832.

96. Igor Sikorsky, "What Can Aircraft Do in the Next War?" *The Independent* 115 (7 November 1925): 521-23.

97. M. W. Royse, "The Next War in the Air," *The Nation* 116 (9 May 1923): 537-39, (16 May 1923): 638-40. The assessment of the implications of America's exposure to

writings on air power come from my own survey of several popular journals, magazines, and books from this period.

98. Stuart Chase, "The Two-Hour War," *The New Republic* (8 May 1929): 325-27.
99. Sherry, *American Air Power*, opposition to air war, 32-34, American view of bombing, 23; see also his view that the large body of predictive literature had little impact in America, 29.
100. Robert T. Finney, *History of the Air Corps Tactical School, 1920-1940* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala: Research Studies Institute, USAF Historical Division, Air University, 1955; repr., Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1992), 7; Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., *The Air Plan That Defeated Hitler* (Atlanta: Higgins-McArthur/Logino & Porter Inc., 1972), 15.
101. Futrell, *Ideas*, 62.
102. Finney, *History of ACTS*, 8-9, 20-21, 46, 56-58, 102; Greer, *Air Doctrine*, 47-49; Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 1, *Plans and Early Operations, January 1939 to August 1942* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948; repr., Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 45-46. One notable exception to this view of the bomber within the ACTS is Claire Chennault's belief that fighters would be able to stop any bombing attack; his views, as well as fighter, close air support and interdiction strategy and doctrine, were largely ignored; see Hansell, *Air Plan*, 18-22, and Greer, *Air Doctrine*, 36-38, 39-40, 60-67.
103. Hansell, *Air Plan*, 16-18, 33-34, 40-41, 46.
104. Finney, *History of ACTS*, 42-43, 56-59, 115-20.
105. Arlington B. Conway, "Death From the Sky," *The American Mercury* (February 1932): 167, 171-72, 176.
106. Thomas R. Phillips, "Debunking Mars' Newest Toys," *The Saturday Evening Post* (4 March 1933): 57-58.
107. John Chamberlain, "The Airplane in War," *The New Republic* (16 August 1939): 51.
108. George Fielding Eliot, "Military Men and the Air Arm," *The New Republic* (13 April 1938): 307.
109. Winston Churchill, "Let the Tyrant Criminals Bomb!" *Collier's* (14 January 1939): 13, 36; Winston Churchill, "Bombs Don't Scare Us Now," *Collier's* (17 June 1939): 11, 36, 57-58.

110. W. B. Courtney, "Rehearsal in Spain," *Collier's* (23 January 1937): 34, 36-37; W. B. Courtney, "Brown and Yellow Bombers," *Collier's* (4 February 1939): 44-46.

111. Jonathan Mitchell, "Death Rides the Wind," *The New Republic* (26 May 1937): 63-64.

112. Thomas R. Phillips, "Preview of Armageddon," *The Saturday Evening Post* (12 March 1938): 12.

113. Arnold, *Global Mission*, 220-21; Greer, *Air Doctrine*, 108-110.

114. Hanson W. Baldwin, "Our New Long Shadow," *Foreign Affairs* (April 1939): 475.

115. Chamberlain, "The Airplane in War," 51; Francis Vivian Drake, "The Air Force We Need," *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 1940): 40-41.

116. Lay, *I Wanted Wings*, 333-47.

117. "'Supercolossal Air Epic': 187-Plane Armada Saves U. S. From 'Black' Invasion," *Newsweek* (23 May 1938): 36-37; W. B. Courtney, "Our War Birds are Best," *Colliers* (14 October 1939): 10-11, 63-65.

118. Chamberlain, "The Airplane in War," 51.

119. George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Volume I, 1935-1948*, (New York: Random House, 1972): 6-7.

120. Ibid, 84.

121. Ibid, 131-32.

122. Ibid, 189-90.

123. Sherry, *American Air Power*, xi.

124. The nature of World War II air power and public reaction to the air war are themes running throughout such works as Sherry, *American Air Power*, Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Conrad C. Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), and to a lesser extent, John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

125. Sherry's photo montage between pages 146 and 147 includes several representative examples of such ads, but the full effect can only be gained by perusing the magazines themselves.

126. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 293, 346-47, 399.
127. Air Force Public Affairs records, hereafter cited as AFPA, reel A1618, frame 0006, Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, Ala, hereafter cited as AFHRA; emphasis in original.
128. Ibid, frames 0008-09.
129. H. H. Arnold and Ira C. Eaker, *Winged Warfare* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941): 133-39.
130. Hansell, *Air Plan*, ch. 4; Craven and Cate, *The AAF*, 115-16, 146-50; Futrell, *Ideas*, 108-112; and James C. Gaston, *Planning The American Air War: Four Men and Nine Days in 1941* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1982) all give detailed accounts of the formulation and acceptance of AWPD-1.
131. Lawrence Howard Suid, ed., *Air Force* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983): 14-15, 17-20; this work is a reprint of the screenplay with an analytical and historical introduction by Suid.
132. Ibid, 158-60.
133. Ibid, 207-11.
134. Ibid, 214-16.
135. Phillip S. Meilinger, "Proselytiser and Prophet: Alexander P. de Seversky and American Airpower," in John Gooch, ed., *Airpower: Theory and Practice* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1995): 9-12.
136. Ibid, 12-14.
137. Alexander P. De Seversky, *Victory Through Air Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942): see for example 335-38.
138. Ibid, 101.
139. Ibid.
140. Ibid, 101-02.
141. Ibid, 120.
142. Meilinger, "Proselytiser," 20.
143. Ibid.

144. Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment*, see for example 69-70, 94, and 98-100.
145. A good illustration of how American popular passions favored brutal war measures is Dower, *War Without Mercy*.
146. Sherry, *American Air Power*, “Bombing in the American Imagination: A Visual Essay,” unpaginated photo montage between pages 146 and 147.
147. David O. Woodbury, “Tokyo Calling Cards,” *Collier’s* 115 (14 April 1945): 44, 58.
148. Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment*, 154.
149. *The Saturday Evening Post Aviation Survey* (Philadelphia: Curtis Publishing, 1946): 14-15.

CHAPTER 3

LET YOUR FAITH SO SHINE: INDIVIDUALS IN THE AIR POWER CRUSADE

Before World War II numerous individuals had come to see air power as a force that had revolutionized warfare, and through the medium of popular culture they managed to gain a significant following among the American public. After the war, however, the notion of revolutionary air power entered the mainstream of American popular culture to a degree unimagined in 1941. In the immediate postwar environment one detects a distinct difference in the status of the claims made for air power. On a superficial level one could point to the sharply increased number of works in popular culture arguing for, or extolling the capabilities of, air power. But on a deeper level one senses a wider acceptance of the notion, described earlier, that air power was more than just a synonym for military aviation, that it represented a frame of mind, a philosophy for understanding not only aviation but its place in the wider world and in human affairs. One reflection of this heightened status is that starting in the May 1945-April 1947 edition of *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* "air power" appears for the first time as a separate subject heading for listing articles.¹ Before that edition, beginning with the July 1932-June 1935 edition, the entry under the term "air power" said merely "See Aeronautics, Military." This latter

practice resumed with the March 1961–February 1963 edition, and the March 1959–February 1961 edition omits the heading “air power” entirely. Between 1945 and 1959, though, whether because of personal conviction or simply reflecting the increased public usage, the editors of the *Reader’s Guide*, like many air power advocates whose writing they listed, treated air power as something bigger than the sum of its parts, as a concept whose borders encompassed far more than just aviation.

The period following World War II witnessed a virtual flood of air power advocacy works in American popular culture bombarding the public imagination with the virtues of, and pressing need for, a strong air power establishment. This flood coursed through several channels: popular magazines, books, novels, radio, movies, television, even a Broadway play and a popular comic strip. No medium seemed inappropriate for conveying the air power advocates’ message. While the message continued well into the 1960s, the torrent seemed to crest in the mid- to late-fifties. The roughly twelve years following 1945 constitutes a “Golden Age” of air power advocacy in popular culture. Several factors help account for the sudden and prolonged surge air power literature: (1) the prominent role played by air power during the war generated support for, and interest in, air power topics within the American populace; (2) the threat of the Cold War and the nuclear arms race made the public susceptible to the technological messianism air power seemed to offer; and of course, (3) aviation and war topics had long been ripe fields for romanticism and high drama in many media of popular culture. Combining the two in an air power piece made for a “sure winner” with the public. But no explanation is complete

without taking into account the sheer faith air power advocates placed in their cause. “The faithful” had preached revolutionary air power before the war and the events of 1938-1945 had convinced them, and new converts besides, that their faith had been well placed. They saw the widespread public support the war had engendered for their cause, and they saw danger to America in the world around them, a danger they felt only air power could meet. All this would have been enough to prompt air power advocates to redouble their efforts after the war, but their energies were further mobilized by their fear that their critics would once again subjugate and scuttle American air power, that the public’s faith did not go deep enough, that somehow the dreams of air power they had so long and fervently nurtured for would once again fall short of their goal.

To understand the popular culture campaign, therefore, we need to understand the new generation of postwar air power advocates and the means by which they sought to bring about the air power revolution. This chapter will examine some of the individuals who singly and collectively carried forward the cause and the methods and media they used to convey that message. The list of individuals who advocated air power is a long and varied one and we have already met some of them in the interwar period. Some of the “old campaigners” carried their work over into the postwar period, but the wartime performance of air power and the rapid escalation of air power advocacy after the war brought many new figures into the arena. We will look briefly at some of the most prominent military and civilian air power advocates who tried to advance their cause through the media of popular culture. Along with a brief biographical sketch, especially the events and experiences which shaped their views toward air power, this chapter will

provide only an abbreviated synopsis of their thoughts; a closer analysis of their views, as expressed in their public works, will form the basis of later chapters. The list is admittedly subjective. Some included in the list may seem not to belong, while many may seem to be left off in error. So many people played a role in advancing the air power popular culture campaign that a full list would be very long indeed. Those presented here seem to be the most influential and representative of the larger phenomenon.

Three of the most prominent military figures, H.H. "Hap" Arnold, Carl "Tooey" Spaatz, and Ira Eaker began their writing activity during the interwar years and resumed that activity after the war ended. One important military figure, though, emerged only after the war brought him to prominence: Curtis E. LeMay. In considering military air power advocates we will look primarily at those who were career officers; several other figures served in the military before or during the war, and that military experience figured prominently in their crusading efforts in the postwar period, but although they often maintained an official connection to the military, such as reserve status, they lived their lives primarily as civilians. Furthermore, we will deal in this chapter only with those military figures whose advocacy can be subjectively deemed to have been outside of their official position with the military. For example, both Arnold and Spaatz wrote articles for popular magazines while they served as leader of the AAF and the Air Force, but their writings began before, and extended after, they assumed that position. Other leaders, like Hoyt Vandenberg, are not included though they wrote pieces for popular consumption during their Air Force career primarily because their writings were confined to, and could

thus be construed as an extension of, their official capacity. Vandenberg's writings, and others of the same category, will be considered in later chapters.

HENRY HARLEY ARNOLD

Born in 1886 in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania the second oldest son of a doctor, Henry H. "Hap" Arnold planned early in life to become a minister. His father, who had served as a surgeon with a volunteer cavalry unit in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, desperately wanted Henry's older brother to attend West Point. After Dr. Arnold had secured an appointment, the elder brother announced he wanted to become an electrical engineer and the appointment went to Henry.² Arnold began his military career at West Point with inauspicious record. A mediocre student, Arnold also showed an early rebellious streak. He was a member of a secret group called the "Black Hand," a group which rebelled against West Point's notorious discipline by creating as much mischief as possible. Arnold also showed at West Point an obsession to live a life of romantic adventure. As a cadet he lived for only one goal - to become a cavalry officer - "the last romantic thing left on earth." When his grades, not to mention his disciplinary record, landed him in the infantry instead of the cavalry upon graduation in 1907, he appealed to his representatives in Congress, but to no avail. After service in the infantry he was sent in 1911 to learn to fly with the Wright Brothers, and in flying he found fulfillment for his longing for romantic adventure.³ During World War I Arnold served in Washington as a staff officer. After the war Arnold became an avid disciple of Billy Mitchell, and after Mitchell's court martial in 1925 he carried on Mitchell's advocacy work until threatened

with a court martial of his own in 1926.⁴ At that point Arnold confined his advocacy work to the books he co-authored with Ira Eaker and the *Bill Bruce* series of aviation adventure stories he wrote for the pre-teenaged reading audience.⁵

After commanding the AAF through World War II Arnold emerged as a highly respected symbol of American air power despite his retirement in early 1946, but his forays into the realm of popular culture were fewer than before the war. This is ironic, for during most of the interwar period Arnold was relatively unknown to the general public, and his postwar notoriety would have undoubtedly added considerable weight to the crusade to sway the public mind. Furthermore, during the war he had done much to “sell” the AAF to the public. For example, he had initiated the projects that resulted in both the movie *Air Force* and the 1944 Moss Hart play *Winged Victory*, which was also turned into a movie.⁶ Arnold’s greatest postwar written work was his autobiography, published in 1949. Primarily a “behind the scenes” memoir of Arnold’s career, the book focuses almost exclusively on the interwar and wartime period and events; little more than five pages of the 615 page work are devoted to the future of air power. Through the entire book, though, Arnold keeps an eye on the contemporary air power debate, but the specific focus is meant to justify earlier actions taken by air power advocates and to reinforce the idea that they had been right all along. The treatment of Mitchell’s entire career, for example, emphasizes the view that while Mitchell had been frequently wrong or unwise in his actions, he was morally right in his prophetic attempts to save America from disaster.⁷ Arnold also wrote a handful of articles arguing the air power cause for such magazines as *National Geographic*, *New York Times Magazine*, and *Collier’s*, but for the most part it

seems that he was serious when he told reporters at his retirement that he was going home to his California ranch to “sit under an oak tree” and forget about airplanes.⁸

Arnold was not a deep and systematic strategic thinker, his strengths lay in other areas, so his strategic conception of air power are hard to nail down. His memoirs give several conflicting indications of what he thought air power should be. This is all the more surprising because he said that one of the Air Service’s key weaknesses when it entered World War I was its lack of a clear doctrine.⁹ Despite fighting hard for strategic bombing in the early days of World War II, Arnold does not seem to have envisioned it in the same manner as other American bombing strategists who were emphasizing systematic precision industrial bombing. He stated that when Douhet’s theory “came out in 1933,” it conformed very closely with the theories the Air Corps had worked out by that time, and that Germany’s use of bombing against Poland was the same methods the AAF would use later in their campaign against Germany.¹⁰ Throughout his account of the air campaign in World War II his emphasis on organizing and building up forces and getting results from their bombing seem to convey no more sophisticated a strategy than defeating the enemy’s air forces and then inflicting as much damage on the enemy as possible in as many ways as possible.¹¹ This depiction of wartime bombing presented to the public conformed well with that which he predicted for postwar air power presented in his November 1945 article, “If War Comes Again.” War in the future, according to Arnold, would be dominated by a sudden and devastating surprise nuclear attack carried out by jet bombers, rockets, and even orbiting spaceships. “Push-button” war was already a reality he warned, and only overwhelming American air power could defend against it.¹²

CARL A. SPAATZ

A more influential figure in the postwar popular culture campaign was Carl A. Spaatz. Born in 1891, Spaatz, like Arnold, was a native Pennsylvanian. His father was a local newspaper editor who had also served in the State Assembly. Spaatz graduated from West Point in 1914, entered pilot training in 1915, saw action in World War I, and shot down three enemy aircraft.¹³ During the interwar period Spaatz, like Arnold, fell into Billy Mitchell's orbit, to the extent of giving dramatic testimony on his behalf at Mitchell's court martial.¹⁴ During World War II Spaatz commanded the U. S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe and was one of the principle architects of the strategic bombing campaign against Germany; after VE day Spaatz assumed command of the U. S. Army Strategic Air Forces in the Pacific and personally conveyed the presidential order to drop the two atomic bombs on Japan. After the war he became the first Chief of Staff of the newly independent Air Force in 1947 and retired in 1948.¹⁵

Before 1945 Spaatz refrained from the popular culture crusade for air power, but after the war he took up the pen and became one of the most prolific military figures arguing air power's case to the public. While he never wrote a book or an autobiography despite numerous requests from publishers and friends,¹⁶ he wrote numerous articles for such magazines as *Foreign Affairs*, *Collier's*, and *Life*. His most prolific work, though, came from the thirteen years he spent as a contributing editor for *Newsweek* during which time he wrote roughly one hundred articles that were featured on a semi-regular basis between 1948 and 1961. Spaatz apparently wrote these articles in close collaboration with his *Newsweek* colleague Kenneth Crawford. Generally Spaatz would develop his

ideas, discuss them with Crawford, Crawford would then type a rough draft which Spaatz would then edit, and together they would write the finished product.¹⁷ While this certainly weakens Spaatz's reputation as a writer it does not change the fact that Spaatz enjoyed the opportunity to routinely place his ideas about air power before a major segment of the reading public over a long period of time.

Spaatz's thoughts on air power, as expressed in popular media, show more depth than Arnold's, and those thoughts changed somewhat over time and in response to Cold War events. His April 1946 article in *Foreign Affairs*, "Strategic Air Power: Fulfillment of a Concept," shows a near complete espousal of strategic bombing of ACTS tradition with its emphasis on industrial paralysis and its assertion that surface forces operate on the periphery while air power strikes immediately and directly at the enemy's heart. This same article, though, also shows the dichotomous rationalization of strategic bombing's Douhet tradition of brutal force, for Spaatz states that the same strategic air power concept that worked so well against Germany was applied in the same manner to Japan.¹⁸ He continued much the same line of reasoning two years later in his premiere *Newsweek* article when he asserted that strategic bombing had done much to defeat Germany and Japan.¹⁹ His exclusive emphasis on strategic bombing softened over time, though, and once the Korean War started he began urging build up of both the Army and Navy.²⁰

IRA C. EAKER

As an air power publicist, Ira C. Eaker followed a most unusual path in the postwar period. Before the war he had collaborated on several books with Arnold, but for

many years after the war he maintained a low profile in the popular culture campaign for air power. Only after most other air power advocates had lapsed into silence in the late Fifties did Eaker resume his efforts to “sell” the public on air power. Born in 1896 in Field Creek, Texas, Eaker grew up a poor farmer. Shortly before his graduation from Southeastern Oklahoma State University, he enlisted in the Army along with the entire male population of the college on the day following America’s declaration of war in 1917. In November of that year Eaker decided to become a pilot almost by accident when a pilot recruiter asked him if he would like to transfer to the Aviation Section. He began pilot training that next March.²¹ Throughout the interwar years Eaker became a noted aviator, rising in rank and position, and at the same time he became a dedicated publicist for air power. Eaker went to the point of obtaining a journalism degree from University of Southern California in 1933 to improve his writing and public relations abilities.²² Eaker put those skills to use in his collaborative writing efforts with Arnold. Together they published three books: *This Flying Game* in 1936, *Winged Warfare* in 1941, and *Army Flyer* in 1942. During World War II Eaker became one of the chief exponents of daylight precision bombing. In fact he was instrumental in winning Churchill’s approval for the American bombing campaign when the issue came to a head at the Casablanca Conference in 1943. During the war he commanded both the Eighth and the Fifteenth Air Forces.²³

Eaker retired in 1947 after rising to second in command of the AAF. He said he wanted to make room for the next generation of Air Force leaders to run the brand-new Air Force, but he did not resume the overt public relations campaign he had begun before the war.²⁴ Instead he worked for Hughes Aircraft from 1947 to 1957, and then as a

lobbyist for Douglas Aircraft until 1961.²⁵ Eaker remained active in the fight to build support for air power, but it was far less active and public than his earlier efforts. He served on the Board of Governors of the National Air Council, though he voiced frustration at its inability to do anything substantive for the cause.²⁶ Eaker also gave numerous speeches throughout the period, but judging from the contents of his papers held at the Library of Congress, the number of speeches was far fewer than other Air Force figures, and after 1956 most of his speeches were before military audiences.²⁷ After leaving Douglas at age 65 he resumed his air power publicist role by launching a weekly newspaper column. Syndicated by the Copley News Service which served up to 1400 subscribers, mostly small daily and weekly newspapers across the country, the column began in 1962 and ran for 18 years, but by then several things had changed, both in Eaker's life and in society. Eaker had developed other interests besides air power, such as business and the war in Vietnam, and society had lost its simple faith in air power. Thus the whole tenor of the air power debate had changed. In short, Eaker's column was not just a crusade to educate the public about air power. While Eaker wrote on air power topics throughout the period, other frequent topics include the need for a strong military, defense industry concerns, standing up to the Soviets, and staying the course in Vietnam.²⁸

Throughout the postwar period Eaker remained an advocate of strategic air power, though the images he projected grew more complex by the early sixties when he wrote his column. In his early speeches his advocacy focused on strategic air power and the Air Force as the first and best deterrence against future aggression. In this he was echoing the themes raised by many air power advocates of that day, but in his early

warning of the threat to America should some other nation acquire atomic weapons, Eaker was ahead of many of his colleagues. Eaker even went so far as to advocate a strategic force ready to destroy any nuclear production facilities in other countries the moment America learned of their existence.²⁹ Eaker's image of air power was that of the Douhet tradition and it was solely embodied by the Air Force. Through the mid-fifties his view of the Air Force and nuclear deterrence as the embodiment of air power seems to have remained unchanged, but by the early sixties his views had changed significantly. He still saw nuclear deterrence as a major part of America's defense establishment, but it was a part in which the Air Force and Navy played equal roles. Moreover, he also saw a significant deterrence role played by the Army and Nato ground forces deployed around the world.³⁰ His image of air power, then, was still in the tradition of Douhet, emphasizing massive destruction through the air, only now it was delivered by both aircraft and missiles and it was backed up by ground forces as an integrated defense team. The old air power crusader had become part of the defense team railing against a changed world.

CURTIS E. LeMAY

The youngest of the military figures considered here, Curtis E. LeMay also represents the new generation of Air Force leaders for whom Eaker was making room. LeMay also represents an entirely different approach to air power advocacy than that followed by the embattled cadre of the interwar years and the Billy Mitchell days; LeMay did his most influential work advancing the cause of air power behind the scenes. Born in 1906 in Columbus, Ohio, LeMay's early life was remarkably different from most air power

advocates. His family was poor and moved around from town to town, state to state as his family followed what jobs his father could find. LeMay entered Ohio State University in 1924 supporting his studies by working the night shift at a local steel foundry but at the end of four years he was 15 credits short of the requirement for graduation. He had completed the ROTC program, though, and was determined to get into the Army as a pilot, and through some creative and determined efforts entered pilot training in 1928.³¹ LeMay served a succession of assignments through the thirties, completed his college degree at Ohio State in 1932, and even managed to achieve a dual rating as both pilot and navigator along the way.³² LeMay rose rapidly in rank with the rapid expansion of the AAF starting in 1940 and entered the war as a Bomb Group commander flying B-17s in England and ended the war as a Major General commanding the XXI Bomber Command. After the war LeMay went on to head the Strategic Air Command from 1948 to 1957 and ended up as Chief of Staff of the Air Force from 1961 until his retirement in 1965.

Throughout the postwar period LeMay played a crucial part in the campaign to convert the public to the cause of air power. During his career he did some writing and gave numerous speeches, but as he himself said, little of that was his own work though it may have reflected his ideas. His most substantial written work is his autobiography published after he retired, and even that was written principally by MacKinlay Kantor with whom LeMay shares authorship credit.³³ LeMay's greatest contribution was his role in shaping the ideas of other, more public, air power advocates through his correspondence and personal contact with them. LeMay corresponded on a routine basis with such figures as Beirne Lay, Sy Bartlett, and Jimmy Stewart, where they communicated on a first name

basis. The letters held in the LeMay collection in the Library of Congress indicate that the correspondence included much more than letters. There are frequent references to phone calls, personal visits, even family vacations spent together. Through the written records, though, it is clear that LeMay played a key role in the intellectual formation of such crucial air power movies as *Twelve O'clock High*, *Above and Beyond*, *Strategic Air Command*, *Bombers B-52*, and *A Gathering of Eagles*.³⁴ Lay and Bartlett, for example, sent LeMay sketches of their ideas for plots of movies on which they were working and asked for his comments and suggestions. LeMay also worked behind-the-scenes as a person of influence who could intercede on behalf of the authors in smoothing out problems with the movie studios or in securing Air Force support for a particular project.³⁵ Similarly, LeMay corresponded with another air power advocate, Arthur Godfrey, and their letters make clear that LeMay played the central role in converting the famous television and radio star from supporting the Navy to backing the Air Force.³⁶

In assessing the image LeMay put before the American public as part of the popular culture crusade, one encounters two problems. The first is that throughout the period under study LeMay was on active duty and held highly visible senior leadership positions. As such he would be expected, some might even say compelled, to make statements or voice opinions that reflect current official policy rather than his own personal views. For this reason LeMay's public statements that seem to fit more in the category of news or official statements have been generally left out of this study. Still, LeMay's long tenure as commander of SAC and his key role in the firebombing and atomic bombing of Japan made him a cultural icon in the public's imagination that made

him the personification of SAC and its nuclear bombing role.³⁷ In this sense, everything LeMay did that made news put before the public the image of strategic air power, particularly the image of the Douhet tradition of air power. The second problem is that with LeMay's off-stage role in the popular culture campaign can one really say that he himself projected any image of air power through the works of Lay, Bartlett, Stewart, and Godfrey? The answer is yes, he projected an image, but it was projected indirectly and through the filter of someone else's work. That image, not surprisingly, conforms closely with his public image as the personification of SAC and nuclear bombing. The message he conveyed to other air power advocates, as seen through his correspondence with them, is that SAC's mission is paramount. If SAC needed more pilots then America needed to see a movie that would convince them of that need (*Strategic Air Command*); if SAC needed more crew chiefs, America needed another film illustrating that need as well (*Bombers B-52*); if critics have begun to undermine SAC by suggesting nuclear war could be triggered accidentally then America needed a movie to reassure the public that it could not happen (*A Gathering of Eagles*). LeMay represented an image of air power to the public and the public could take that image into account with everything he said. With his behind-the-scenes work to advance that same image, however, few could prove, though many may have suspected, that what they saw or heard was partly the work of LeMay.

Civilian air power advocates played a key role in the popular culture campaign and their efforts were the most critical for several different reasons. First, many Americans would suspect a military figure of partisanship for obvious reasons. Naturally a career flier

would think air power is important because he had devoted his life to it, and an Air Force general would never think the Air Force was big enough or had airplanes that were good enough. A civilian, however, even one coming from a limited military background, would have at least a thin veneer of impartiality. Secondly, no matter how gifted a writer a military figure might be, writing was still a secondary venture and was limited to the medium of the printed word. Military fliers brought expertise, civilians brought diversity and talent. Some civilian advocates were gifted and award-winning writers. Others were stars of stage, screen, radio, and later, television, and they brought to the cause notoriety and stage-presence. Still others made movies and thus could craft powerful visual images. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, anything military advocates wanted to put before the public had to go through civilian intermediaries. Spaatz might write a powerful article but he had to find a like-minded, or at least willing, publisher to get it printed. LeMay might want a movie telling the SAC story but it had to be pushed by someone inside the movie industry to get past other storylines competing for limited production schedules. In short, civilians controlled all the media in popular culture so military air power advocates had to work indirectly to get their message across, but an airminded civilian working inside one of the media could present his or her thoughts much more directly.

ALEXANDER P. de SEVERSKY

Alexander P. de Seversky's air power advocacy continued into the postwar period. One measure of his stature resulting from his wartime writings is that shortly after the war he received two prestigious awards: the Medal for Merit, the highest wartime civilian

award, in 1946, and the Harmon Trophy, presented each year to the world's outstanding airman, in 1947. The citations accompanying each award make clear that they were presented in recognition for his wartime efforts to build popular support for air power.³⁸ Another indication of the reputation he had built for himself was that at the close of the war Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson sent de Seversky to Europe and Japan as a special consultant to survey the effects of the strategic bombing campaign.³⁹

The end of the war, though, saw no let-up in de Seversky's writing, nor in his unique ability to stir controversy. He wrote numerous articles throughout the late 1940s, published primarily in *American Mercury* and *Reader's Digest*. One topic of these articles stirred immediate outrage that generated public debate. Based on his brief survey of bombing damage in Germany and Japan de Seversky claimed that the press had grossly exaggerated the effects of atomic bombs. Alluding to the prevalence of wood and paper construction of Japanese housing, de Seversky stated that fire had done most of the damage at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that the damage was quite comparable to the damage seen in Japanese cities that had been firebombed, and that if dropped on a "modern" city like New York it would do no more damage than a conventional "blockbuster."⁴⁰ The response was immediate and emphatic. Critics pointed out that the modern Japanese buildings that survived the blast and that de Seversky had pointed to to prove his point were actually built stronger than American buildings so they could survive Japan's frequent earthquakes. More importantly, his critics charged, de Seversky was lulling Americans into a false sense of security at the very time world leaders were trying to gain international agreement on the control of atomic weapons.⁴¹

De Seversky's other articles were less controversial but no less insistent, and in 1950, shortly after the outbreak of the Korean War, he brought them together in a book titled *Air Power: Key to Survival*. The book was not nearly as popular as was *Victory Through Air Power*; the Book of the Month Club did not carry it, which undoubtedly hurt its sales, and it sold only 30,000 copies.⁴² In this book he places his earlier comments on atomic bombs into the context of his larger vision of air power, which sees the paramount need in warfare as seizing air superiority which then allows strategic bombing, including atomic weapons, to decide the issue. He claimed that contemporary thinking on atomic bombs deluded the public into thinking that a relatively small number of bombs and bombers could easily, quickly, and cheaply defeat an enemy nation. Lest anyone think he was softening his view on bombing, one should note that his vision of future war with Russia involved a lengthy battle for air superiority lasting months or even years and which would require thousands of atomic weapons and millions of conventional bombs.⁴³ Still, this approach, to de Seversky, was cheaper than, and offered the only alternative to, the policy of balanced forces America had been pursuing up to that time. He still saw surface forces as obsolete, and against the Soviet Union he felt they were useless. America could not match Soviet manpower on the ground and the Navy could do the Soviets little real harm. America's only hope, according to de Seversky, was to emphasize its greatest strength: its natural superiority as the world's greatest airminded nation.⁴⁴

This vision of air power was the most extreme expression of the Douhet tradition to appear in the popular culture crusade. De Seversky even pushed forward the sophistry that America could pursue this strategy without targeting civilians, which he opposed as

counter-productive, and that the Soviet citizens would not feel they had been targeted.⁴⁵

The harsh vision did not seem to catch on with the public. Not only did the book sell poorly, but his next and last book, *America - Too Young to Die*, published in 1961, sold even fewer copies and had little new to offer. While de Seversky wrote articles throughout the period, his popularity wained. *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* lists only one article appearing in a general interest national magazine after the publication of *Air Power: Key to Survival*, a piece bearing the lurid title "World War III and How to Win It" published by *Coronet* in 1955.⁴⁶ As one scholar has noted, "his writings became increasingly repetitious and technologically dated."⁴⁷ Still, his works influenced the thinking of other air power enthusiasts, particularly William Bradford Huie, who then magnified de Seversky's audience by incorporating some of his ideas into their works.

WILLIAM BRADFORD HUIE

Perhaps one of the most intriguing but little remembered air power advocates was writer William Bradford Huie. Born in 1910 in Hartselle, Alabama, Huie launched on a career in journalism in 1932 as a reporter for the *Birmingham Post*. During the early years of World War II he was an associate editor of the *American Mercury*, and from 1943 to 1945 he served in the Navy, rising to the rank of lieutenant. After the war he resumed his work with the *American Mercury* as editor and publisher from 1945 to 1952. This was his last formal employment, for after 1952 he earned his living as a free-lance writer and lecturer.⁴⁸ To most Americans he is remembered, if at all, as the author of the best-selling novel *The Americanization of Emily* (1959), which was made into a movie

starring James Garner and Julie Andrews. Collectively, though, his less well known books paint the picture of a life-long reformer. Historians of the civil rights movement know Huie for such critically acclaimed books as *The Klansman* (1967) and *Three Lives for Mississippi* (1965); civil libertarians might know him for *The Execution of Private Slovik* (1954), which was made into a television movie, and *Ruby McCollum: Woman in the Suwannee Jail* (1956).

Air power, though, was Huie's first cause, but it was a cause he would repudiate later in life. He began his curious odyssey in the early days of World War II when, as an associate editor for the *American Mercury*, he came in contact with de Seversky and Hugh Knerr, at the time a retired Air Corps colonel. Huie talked with these two men and read the articles they had written for the *American Mercury* and somewhere in the process of this exposure Huie was converted, for in 1942 he wrote, with considerable help from Knerr, *The Fight For Air Power*, a passionate plea for America to end the domination and suppression of air power by Army and Navy leaders who did not understand it.⁴⁹ Huie's personal story then takes a curious turn. He joined the Navy the next year and served out the rest of the war as a naval officer. While one might have expected Huie to join the AAF, his joining the Navy is all the more curious because his 1942 book is particularly harsh on the admirals. His postwar writings escalated his anti-Navy rhetoric even further. In his 1946 book, *The Case Against the Admirals*, Huie claims that he enjoyed his wartime service and that he had many reasons to love the Navy. Many admirals were friends of his and his only brother was at that time a naval officer. Huie even points to the two highly complementary books he wrote during the war about the Navy's seabees as proof of his

devotion to the sea service. Nevertheless, Huie's belief that the admirals were blocking unification and in the process, hindering air power, compelled him to write a painful book about how the Navy's wartime and postwar obstructionism was hurting the nation.⁵⁰

There are no such *mea culpas* in his postwar articles, though, and it is these articles that convey Huie's conception of air power most clearly. Writing primarily for *American Mercury* and *Reader's Digest*, Huie returned repeatedly to his favorite topics: the need for a strong strategic air force to deter war, unification to eliminate duplication, and Navy obstructionism. Perhaps the most representative of his thinking during this period is his 1949 article, commissioned by *Reader's Digest*, "The Facts Which Must Prevent War." Meant as a warning to the Soviet Union when the Berlin Blockade was at its height, Huie stated that despite a communist inspired "propaganda campaign" to minimize the effectiveness of atomic bombs and American Army and Navy efforts to undermine the Air Force's strategic forces, SAC had enough bombs and bombers to "do to Russia, if Russia attacks us, what Rome did to Carthage."⁵¹ Having read de Seversky's work and publicly commenting on its great value,⁵² it is not surprising that Huie should have such an apocalyptic view of American air power, but the key phrase in Huie's tirade is "if Russia attacks us." Huie saw the world confronted by a grave danger and wanted to avoid another devastating war; note the emphasis Huie places on the word "must" in the title of his article. He could visualize the awesome power of the tradition of Douhet and he felt that power could deliver the world of great evil, first Hitler, and after the war the Bolsheviks. In short, technological messianism drew Huie to air power and so great was the attraction that it even prompted him to wage a ten year running battle with the Navy.

The bellicose sabre-rattling of Huie's postwar writings points to a final irony in the story of William Bradford Huie, air power advocate. Huie's public efforts on behalf of air power seem to have ended in 1951, and he then turned to other causes. Later in life, though, he turned against nuclear weapons with the same vehemence he showed when he turned against the Navy. His *How America Failed Mankind* tells the story of how some of America's atomic scientists tried to get the United States to abandon the atomic bomb as a weapon of war. Calling the work "the most important story of the twentieth century," Huie stated that "all I want to do is to make people everywhere understand how the world's *only* superpower in 1946 became, in only 35 years, the broke and confused thing we now call the United States of America."⁵³ The events which turned Huie, and others, against air power, a force Huie had helped to create in 1946, is a subject to which we will return in later chapters.

BEIRNE LAY, JR.

The figures of Beirne Lay, Jr., and Sy Bartlett represent not only two significant air power advocates, but also a phenomenon that helps explain some of the driving force behind the crusade for air power in the postwar period. Both men, like countless others, served in the AAF during the war, but at war's end they left active service and resumed their civilian careers. For these two men that career happened to be writing, which they soon put to use in the air power cause. Between the two of them they played key roles in bringing about what is widely regarded as the best air power film ever made, *Twelve O'clock High*, and three films collectively known as the "SAC Trilogy," *Strategic Air*

Command, Bombers B-52, and A Gathering of Eagles. In countless other cases, though, individuals left the AAF convinced that air power was a revolutionary new force in warfare and they took that conviction with them into their corner of the world. Some, like Jimmy Stewart and Clark Gable, found influential ways to bring their support before the public, but many other unknown air power advocates discovered small though significant opportunities to “carry their spear” in the fight for air power.

Beirne Lay was born in 1909 in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, but he called Charlottesville, Virginia, home. He graduated from Yale in 1931, entered Air Corps pilot training and graduated in 1933.⁵⁴ Lay then spent the next six years alternating between active duty and the inactive reserve as Air Corps appropriations dictated, until 1939 when he was recalled after the war started in Europe.⁵⁵ During that period Lay turned his hand to writing and described his pilot training experiences in *I Wanted Wings* which became a best seller in 1937. When the book became the basis of a movie by the same name in 1941 Lay collaborated on the screenplay. After America entered the war Lay served two staff tours in England working as one of Eaker’s “original seven” setting up the Eighth Air Force, and then was given command of a B-24 bomber group, the 487th. Exactly one month after the group’s arrival in England in April 1944, however, Lay was shot down over France. His 1945 book *I’ve Had It* tells the story of his brief command and his efforts to escape back to allied territory.⁵⁶

After the war Lay, by now a colonel, reverted to reserve status with the AAF and returned to writing. During the war Sy Bartlett had discussed with Lay the necessity of collaborating on a book about the strategic bombing campaign against Germany, a project

that resulted in the best-seller *Twelve O'clock High!* Bartlett felt Lay's experience as an author, screenwriter, and bomb group commander made him a perfect choice for a co-author.⁵⁷ Twentieth Century Fox bought the movie rights in a package deal that included Lay and Bartlett writing the screenplay, and Darryl F. Zanuck, head of production at the studio and, as a charter member of the Air Power League, a firm supporter of advancing air power, produced the film.⁵⁸ After the success of *Twelve O'clock High*, Lay went on to other film projects, most notably *Above and Beyond* (1952), *Strategic Air Command* (1955), and *Bombers B-52* (1957). One significant aspect of Lay's career as an author and screenwriter is that after the war he maintained more than just a reserve officer's ties with the Air Force. Through this entire period he maintained a prolonged correspondence with Curtis LeMay, intimate to the point of being on a first name basis with the notoriously gruff SAC commander. In this relationship Lay continually sought LeMay's input on the air power films Lay was developing, and in exchange LeMay urged Lay to pursue certain topics critical to LeMay and the Air Force.⁵⁹

Lay's conception of air power comes across mainly through his film projects which convey broad-brush imagery, and thus his theoretical views are hard to pin down. The underlying premise of *Twelve O'clock High* is that daylight precision bombing will decide the fate of the war, but only if it can survive long enough to prove its critics wrong. One bomber group's troubles could provide the excuse for Washington to kill the whole strategy. The message at the end of the book and movie is clear to the audience: Frank Savage saved the 918th, daylight precision bombing survived and won the war, thus strategic bombing remains America's salvation in the Cold War. Other movies, though,

show less concern for the theory of daylight precision bombing than for a massive bomber force armed with nuclear weapons. *Above and Beyond* tells the story of Paul Tibbets and his role in the Hiroshima bombing. *Strategic Air Command* puts a famous baseball player, who also happens to be a reserve Air Force pilot who has been recalled to active duty, in the position of deciding between his baseball career, fame, fortune, and his wife's wishes on the one hand, and the needs of the Air Force on the other. In Lay's script the ballplayer, recognizing how much SAC needs pilots and how much America needs a big nuclear force, gives up baseball to remain on active duty after his remobilization tour ends. *Bombers B-52* highlights SAC's need for career crewchiefs. Because of this need once again the main character goes against his personal desires and those of his family when he decides to remain on active duty beyond the point when he could retire. In these last three films, there is no talk of precision bombing; air power means nuclear weapons and SAC, and SAC means deterrence through the threat of nuclear annihilation. Taken together Lay's works show a faith in deliverance through air power's bombing capabilities, but the conceptualization of those capabilities quickly makes the transition from the precise efficiency of the ACTS tradition to the utter obliteration of the Douhet tradition.

SY BARTLETT

Sy Bartlett's story parallels Lay's in many respects. Born in 1909, Bartlett became a journalist and a screenwriter before winding up in the Army's Signal Corps in 1941.⁶⁰ Bartlett had always been fascinated with flying and air power, so he arranged a meeting with Lay through a mutual acquaintance; Bartlett and Lay became friends and Lay arranged

Bartlett's transfer to the Air Corps. Bartlett then spent the war as a high level staff officer in Britain and the Pacific. It was his staff experiences in Britain and his behind-the-scenes knowledge of what the Eighth Air Force was trying to do that convinced Bartlett that the public had to be told about strategic bombing.⁶¹

After the war Bartlett, who had risen to the rank of lieutenant colonel, left active duty but retained his commission on an inactive reserve basis. He resumed his career as a screenwriter under contract with Twentieth Century Fox and wrote many screenplays in the course of his career, including *13 Rue Madeleine*. In the Spring of 1946, however, he badgered Lay into starting the *Twelve O'clock High!* project they had discussed during the war. A large part of the pitch Bartlett used to sell Lay was their mutually shared sense of responsibility to inform the public about the fight to make strategic bombing work. Thus we see that Bartlett, like Lay, began the postwar period by presenting to the public his view that daylight precision bombing was the heart of air power, the means by which air power had revolutionized warfare. Like Lay in another sense, though, Bartlett transformed his public presentation of air power from that of a nimble rapier in *Twelve O'clock High* to one of a brutal club in his only other air power project, *A Gathering of Eagles* (1963). This film, produced by Bartlett, tells of a B-52 wing commander who takes over a new base to whip it into shape. Like *Strategic Air Command* and *Bombers B-52*, the intended message is to inform the public of the vital role SAC plays in protecting America through nuclear deterrence. The film is also meant to reassure Americans that the concerns raised by such novels as Peter George's *Red Alert* (1958) and *Fail Safe* by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler (1962) are unfounded. A nuclear war could not be

triggered accidentally or without presidential authorization. *A Gathering of Eagles* brings up yet another parallel with Beirne Lay. Bartlett maintained a warm correspondance with Curtis LeMay - they too were on a first name basis - and this correspondance is what first prompted Bartlett to believe there was a need for the film and to conceive the storyline.⁶²

WILLIAM WISTER HAINES

The story of another postwar air power writer, William Wister Haines, bears some striking similarities to the lives of Lay and Bartlett. Born in 1908 in Des Moines, Iowa, Haines grew up in an engineer's home and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1931.⁶³ After college Haines began writing novels and screenplays, but he did not show any early interest in aviation. His first two novels, *Slim* (1934) and *High Tension* (1938), were about the men who worked powerlines. During the Second World War, though, Haines joined the AAF, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel, and worked deciphering German codes, an experience that led to his 1986 book *Ultra and the History of the U. S. Strategic Air Force Versus the German Air Force*.⁶⁴

After the war Haines' experience with the AAF inspired his only work directly related to the air power debate, but it was a work of such magnitude that it warrants his consideration among the ranks of influential air power advocates. That work was *Command Decision*. The story began its life as a three-act play that opened in late 1946 in Cleveland, in late 1947 in New York, and then became a hit on Broadway in late 1948. The play was also published in book form by Random House in 1947. Because the play was so successful Haines rewrote it as a novel, which was serialized in *Atlantic Monthly*,

condensed in *Reader's Digest*, and published in book form in 1947.⁶⁵ The play and novel generated considerable interest in Hollywood. It was one of the first war movies to go into production after the war ended, but some production executives questioned how the public would react to the strident nature of the lead character Brigadier General K. C. Dennis. In the course of fighting for a critical strategic bombing mission Dennis has several heated arguments with his boss and a prominent reporter, assaults a Congressman, and is relieved of his command. Twentieth Century Fox pursued a deal with Haines, but eventually backed out and turned to *Twelve O'clock High* instead. The two stories were so similar in fact, Fox executives worried they or Lay and Bartlett would face plagiarism charges, a concern that did not materialize.⁶⁶ Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer immediately bought the rights to *Command Decision* and cast Clark Gable in the lead role. The film premiered in late 1948. That both Twentieth Century Fox and MGM would pursue, and Gable would star in, this critically acclaimed paean to American air power is hardly surprising: numerous executives of both studios were charter members of the Air Power League, and Gable was not only a charter member but also sat on the League's board of directors.⁶⁷

Haines' conception of air power, as depicted in *Command Decision*, is that in a general sense air power has revolutionized warfare, but more specifically that strategic bombing holds the key to true success in warfare. In his story, Germany has developed a secret weapon that will turn the war around, a jet-powered fighter far superior to the allies' conventional fighter. The jet will make the Germans unbeatable in the air, and thus the audience is told that air power can win the war for Germany. But the Americans hold an even more powerful weapon: daylight precision bombing. Bombing, the audience is

told, can destroy Germany's jets at their source, the factory, before they have a chance to impact the war. The plot then revolves around the drama of who will win the argument, and by extension, the war. If Dennis silences his many critics strategic bombing will prove its potential and win the war, if his critics prevail then German air power will by default prevail. In either case, according to Haines, the war will be decided in the air. The only question for Haines is whether Americans have the mettle to use the most decisive weapon despite its high costs in men and materiel. Surface forces are treated as superfluous and inconsequential to the larger struggle going on over their heads - both figuratively and literally. While Haines and Huie both share technological messianistic views of salvation wrought by air power and present those views to the public, they approach the subject from opposite perspectives. Huie's view reflects the Douhet tradition of apocalyptic destruction, Haines' views embody the ACTS tradition of scientific precision yielding surgical paralysis. In fact, the theorists of the ACTS could hardly ask for a more faithful and powerful presentation of their theories. Haines even goes to the extent of couching his depiction in the old imagery of the progressive struggle against "the interests": the young, dedicated Dennis pits his "modern" theories against the evils of interservice infighting and political chicanery in a way that wins the sympathies of all good progressives over to Dennis, and by extension, the cause of strategic bombing and air power.

MILTON A. CANIFF

One of the more curious chapters in the popular culture campaign for air power is the part played by Milton A. Caniff, the creator of the popular *Steve Canyon* comic strip.

Born in 1907 in Hillsboro, Ohio, Caniff graduated from Ohio State University in 1930 and began his career as a cartoonist with several newspapers before launching his first hit comic strip *Terry and the Pirates* in 1934.⁶⁸ Caniff continued with the strip until 1946 when he left the syndicate which owned the copyright for *Terry and the Pirates* so that he could launch his own strip - *Steve Canyon*. The hero of the new strip was an Air Force pilot and was built around his many adventures as he was sent by the Air Force to trouble spots around the world. This comic strip inspired a television series by the same name that ran for one year starting in September 1958, and Caniff acted as script and story consultant for the series.⁶⁹

Caniff's work shows an early and prolonged interest in air power. In *Terry and the Pirates* Terry joins the AAF during World War II, and in *Steve Canyon* Caniff continually weaves contemporary air power themes and concerns into the plot. In 1954, for example, Canyon is sent to command an Air Defense Command fighter-interceptor squadron in Alaska. Caniff uses this plot line to repeatedly emphasize the importance of ADC's Alaskan bases as the first line of defense against a Soviet bomber attack that he felt could come at any time.⁷⁰ Throughout his career Caniff also made many friends in the Air Force, some of whom he used as the basis of characters in his strips.⁷¹ While Caniff clearly favored air power and worked for its advancement, he also paid tribute to the sacrifices of military members of all the services in features that ran on special occasions such as Armed Forces Day and Christmas. His interest in air power and his support for the military in general touches on an interesting psychological irony. In a feature for *Collier's* in 1948 Caniff states that his reasons for building his *Steve Canyon* comic strip

around the adventures of an Air Force pilot stem from Caniff's own "Walter Mitty-esque" fantasies about living a life of derring-do, but not only did Caniff never serve in the military, during his college days he was one of the central figures in the on-going protests of the ROTC program at the Ohio State campus. Caniff later claimed that his protests were motivated by the fact that ROTC training was mandatory only for students at land-grant colleges. He said he supported Universal Military Training, but felt it should apply to all young men, not just those at certain colleges.⁷² From all this one might gather that while Caniff continually urged military preparedness and extolled the virtues of air power, and while he might fantasize about living the adventures in his comic strip, he preferred to work behind the scenes building public support.

The vision of air power presented in *Steve Canyon* is very much a scatter-shot approach running over the course of many years. The net effect is one of impressionistic images generated over a long period of time. While this may seem to negate his impact, one should remember that his strip was consistently very popular, thus many readers assimilated these impressions over the long haul.⁷³ The revolutionary impact of air power is frequently highlighted, as when in 1947 he compares it to Columbus' voyages, or again on 1 August of the same year, designated Air Force Day, when a character states that the nation should never forget the "awful power" of warplanes and let another Pearl Harbor occur; the strip also carries the logo "Air Power is Peace Power."⁷⁴ In the postwar setting Canyon was a fighter pilot, and while this gave numerous opportunities to extoll various fighter missions, such as air defense, Caniff also emphasized strategic bombing. The strip frequently mentions that Canyon had flown bombers during the war, and that he

had flown on the famous Ploesti bombing raids. Another example is the key role a B-52 plays in a 1956 episode where Canyon decides to stay in the Air Force rather than accept a lucrative movie contract.⁷⁵ Overall, the conception of air power Caniff presents is not as detailed as Huie's or as vivid as Lay's, but it is a consistent glorification of air power in its universal application. Caniff's efforts were deeply appreciated by the air power community. He received letters of thanks from Arnold, Doolittle, and Vandenberg; both Congress and the Air Force repeatedly recognized him for his long-term support, and the Air Force Association, of which he was a long-time member, proclaimed Caniff their Man of the Year for 1966.⁷⁶ Rather than an advocate of specific air power theories, Caniff stands more as a major popularizer of air power as an intangible concept.

ARTHUR GODFREY

A key figure advocating for air power throughout the fifties was Arthur Godfrey. An early celebrity in the days when television's power was first being felt, his voice reached millions of Americans through his popular radio and television programs. Born in 1903 in New York City, Godfrey was a high school drop-out who joined the Navy in 1920 and served until 1924. He also served in the Coast Guard from 1927 until 1929, and at the outbreak of World War II he gained a reserve commission as a lieutenant commander and remained a longterm naval reservist. He maintained a sailing interest throughout his life. Interestingly, the various biographical sketches on him list no aviation or air power organizations among the various groups and organizations to which he belonged.⁷⁷ Godfrey broke into radio in 1930, but his popularity did not really begin until after World

War II when he starred in such highly rated shows as the *Arthur Godfrey Time* which aired on CBS in 1946, and *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* which began with CBS in 1947 and continued through at least 1956.⁷⁸ Godfrey's success on radio led to his transition to television in 1948 with *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts*, which ran on CBS until 1958, and *Arthur Godfrey and His Friends* which ran on CBS from 1949 until 1959. Both shows were enormously popular. He is the only star in television history to have two top-rated prime time shows at the same time, and his popularity, which ran strong through the mid-fifties, made him a media celebrity.⁷⁹

Like Huie, Godfrey was a Navy apostate. After the war he had been a well known Navy advocate, so when he converted to the air power gospel and became an outspoken air power advocate it got considerable media attention and became perhaps one of the popular culture crusade's greatest coups. Godfrey had been using his radio and television "bully pulpit" since before the war to proselytize for the Navy. The Navy was eager to exploit such loyalty, and since Godfrey had gained a private pilot's license, it sent him through basic flight training in 1950, as well as the jet qualification course in 1951. In the following 13 months Godfrey, in rapid succession, gained Navy certification in instrument flying, carrier landings, helicopters, and blimps.⁸⁰ In the course of his career, though, Godfrey came to know Hoyt Vandenberg who in 1951 pressed him on his Navy slant and challenged him to, "put out a true story for a change." Godfrey asked, "What *is* the true story?" To which Vandenberg replied, "Go out to SAC and they'll show you." Godfrey went to SAC, heard their story, visited several bases around the world, got converted, and began spreading the word about air power in the press and on his shows. When the Navy

tried to pressure him to stop such activity he resigned his commission in 1955. The Air Force, bending its own medical qualification rules, gave Godfrey a reserve commission with the rank of Colonel and retired him the next day.⁸¹ Curtis LeMay played a key role in changing Godfrey's views and in the process they developed a close friendship. In a Christmas greeting in 1952 Godfrey wrote a heart-felt letter to LeMay in which he stated:

Your friendship has not only influenced my life, but through me some of that part of you that became a part of me has gone out to the millions of Americans [who] listen to me on the radio or watch me on TV.... You and several others of our mutual friends have time and again encouraged me in my feeble efforts to pass the word. I had to be sure, first, that it was the right word and you helped me to know that.... To you, for your part in this (and it was a big one) I am grateful.⁸²

He then set out to "pass the word" by capitalizing on his own popularity. A measure of his dedication to the cause can be seen in the 24 December 1955 conclusion to his eight-part autobiography serialized by the *Saturday Evening Post*. In this article Godfrey stated that the whole reason he planned to continue in broadcasting was because he felt it was his mission to inform the American people about the desparate need for air power.⁸³ Godfrey's impact as an air power advocate came from more than just the fact that he was heard and seen by millions on a weekly basis. He was the most popular figure in radio and television at that time. He averaged over 60,000 pieces of fan mail per month, far and away more than any other personality, and his "boy next door" manner led people to believe just about anything he said. When a mother asked if the Air Force would provide a good environment for her daughter who wished to join, Godfrey extolled the Air Force as a good environment for women and detailed the educational opportunities provided for

them. In response he received 152 letters from mothers stating that because of his assurances their daughters were about to join the Air Force.⁸⁴

Godfrey's idea of air power was simple and straight-forward: the Soviet threat to America could only be deterred by strategic air power, so America needed a massive strategic force to keep the Soviets from launching an attack. In 1953 Godfrey stated in an interview with the International News Service that while the Air Force could still launch a tremendous nuclear strike against the Soviet Union, failure to put B-52s into full scale production had left SAC's bomber fleet inadequate and obsolete. He further stated that a large B-52 force would "probably be the greatest deterrent to World War III that it is in our power to decide."⁸⁵ Godfrey repeated this same basic message in other settings, such as speeches before various groups, and whenever he talked he made news, thus magnifying the audience of his message.⁸⁶ Godfrey also saw Air Force troop morale as an important key to air power and he used his electronic soapbox to boost morale. In this effort he filmed shows at Air Force bases, including remote Thule, Greenland, he suggested to LeMay a system of Air Force-run television stations at remote bases and donated his shows to be broadcast on the system, and he fought for military pay raises.⁸⁷ Godfrey's message may not have been profound, but he reached millions, many of whom put great trust in his words, and he reached them on a consistent basis throughout much of the Fifties; in this way he not only reinforced the more profound thoughts on air power voiced by other advocates, he also probably did more than anyone else to popularize the air power gospel with the masses.

JIMMY STEWART

Another popular star who helped sell air power to the American public was Jimmy Stewart. Born in 1908 in Indiana, Pennsylvania, Stewart came from a long line of military service. Direct ancestors had fought in the Revolution, both grandfathers fought for the Union in the Civil War, and his father fought with the Rough Riders in the Spanish-American War and served in France in World War I. Stewart left the family-owned hardware store to graduate from Princeton, as his father had, in 1931, and then pursued an acting career in which, by 1941, he had achieved considerable fame.⁸⁸ Stewart showed an early interest in flying - at the age of four he tried to fly a pushmobile off the roof of a shed - and by 1941 owned his own plane and part of Southwest Airways. In March 1941 he became the first Hollywood star to enlist, and he was also the first to see combat. Significantly, Stewart could have easily avoided service as well as combat. In May 1941 his age would have made him ineligible for the draft, he flunked his first physical for being underweight, and once in the Army he could have encouraged the Army's desire to keep him in stateside postings where he would be available for publicity efforts. Stewart entered pilot training and became a B-17 pilot by 1942, but the AAF, concerned about sending someone of Stewart's stature into combat, sent him to a base in Idaho as a squadron commander and instructor pilot. After nine months of badgering the AAF to get him into a combat unit, Stewart transitioned to B-24s and in 1943 went to England as a squadron commander with the 445th Bomb Group. During the course of the war he served as a group operations officer, wing chief of staff, and finally became commander of the Second Combat Wing; he flew 20 combat missions, rose to the rank of colonel, and

won both the Distinguished Flying Cross with one Oak Leaf Cluster and the Croix de Guerre. After the war Stewart maintained his official ties with the Air Force as a reserve officer and eventually rose to the rank of brigadier general.⁸⁹

Stewart's war years turned him into a dedicated proponent of air power, particularly strategic bombing. For many years he corresponded with Curtis LeMay and the two traded suggestions on how they could better convey strategic bombing's capabilities to the public, suggestions which Stewart incorporated into his many public speaking opportunities.⁹⁰ After the war Stewart was one of the founders of the Air Force Association and sat on its board of directors.⁹¹ Stewart's most overt act to foster air power, though, came with his involvement with the movie *Strategic Air Command*. Stewart first suggested the idea of the movie and its basic outline to Beirne Lay and asked Lay to develop it into a story. Interestingly, both individuals corresponded with LeMay about the project as it moved through its various stages. Stewart was also a key figure in getting Paramount to commit to the project and helped select the film's director.⁹² Stewart contributed more than just these behind-the-scenes machinations, though; he also contributed his name. The Stewart name meant not only the kind of star appeal that would draw more people to see it - the film became the seventh top film for the year in box office sales - it also meant that Stewart's reputation, both as an actor and as a well-known war hero, lent the movie's message legitimacy.

The image of air power Stewart presented to the public was, if anything, even simpler than Godfrey's. *Strategic Air Command* told America that strategic bombing was the critical force keeping America safe, and since the film's plot revolves around the lead

character, played by Stewart, coming to realize that message, the American public came to associate that message with the character and with Stewart himself. The fact that the message corresponded so closely with Stewart's wartime record and with the image air power advocates had consciously shaped for World War II strategic bombing only made Stewart more closely identified as the embodiment of SAC and SAC's mission. After Rock Hudson completed filming *A Gathering of Eagles*, another film about SAC and its strategic bombing mission, he stated that filming on a SAC base had corrected his earlier misimpression that SAC was just "Jimmy Stewart and a big airplane."⁹³ Many people probably thought the same thing. Stewart reinforced the connection by sharing the SAC story in his speaking engagements.⁹⁴ While his message may have been a simple one, the fact that people connected strategic air power with a name that was known in every household meant that Stewart had succeeded in carrying his message to millions of Americans in a way they were not likely to forget.

These are just a few of the individuals who worked in some capacity to advance the air power cause through the medium of popular culture. The list is potentially endless, and several other figures will appear throughout subsequent chapters. Clark Gable, for example, not only gave one of the best performances of his career in the film version of *Command Decision*, he also forged an interest in air power when serving in the Eighth Air Force during World War II and then after the war served as a key figure in two organizations seeking to advance the cause of air power. Francis Vivian Drake and W.B. Courtney, as military commentators for two major national general interest magazines

wrote numerous articles throughout the period extolling the virtues of air power. These are just a few of the additional figures who were important to the popular culture campaign. Taken together, these individuals, and many others, make up an eclectic group who brought a wide array of talents and motivations from a diverse background to the one cause that united them all - they all believed that the airplane was more than just a new weapon, and that air power was more than just military aviation - they believed that air power had revolutionized warfare. More importantly, they believed that they each had to share their faith with the American public to convince every man, woman, and child to share their faith as well.

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2. H. H. Arnold, *Global Mission* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 5-6. This autobiography is supplemented by the only biography on Arnold by Thomas M. Coffey, *Hap: The Story of the U.S. Air Force and the Man Who Built it* (New York: Viking Press, 1982).
3. Ibid, 6-9, 16-20.
4. Ibid, 111-14, 119-23; Edgar F. Puryear, Jr., *Stars in Flight: A Study in Air Force Character and Leadership* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1981), 18-19.
5. H. H. Arnold, *Bill Bruce Series* (New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1928).
6. Suid, *Air Force*, 14; Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 115-17, 186; *Winged Victory* Supplement, AFPA, microfilm reel 1619, frames 1817-25, AFHRA.
7. Arnold, *Global Mission*, see especially 99-100, 113-14, 119-22.
8. Ibid, 609.
9. Ibid, 52.
10. Ibid, 131-32, 191-92.
11. Ibid, see for example Arnold's summation of what bombing had done to Germany and what its prospects would be against Japan, 564.
12. H. H. Arnold, "If War Comes Again," *New York Times Magazine* (18 November 1945): 5, 38-39.
13. David R. Mets, *Master of Airpower* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1988), 4-6, 13, 30-35. This work remains the definitive biography of Spaatz, although Richard G. Davis, *Carl A. Spaatz and the Air War in Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force History, 1993) provides a wealth of information on Spaatz's career up through 1945.
14. DeWitt S. Copp, *A Few Great Captains: The Men and Events That Shaped U. S. Air Power* (McLean, Va.: EPM Publications, 1980), 45-46.
15. Mets, *Master of Airpower*, 176-80, 294-95, 302-03, 322, 330-32.
16. James Perkins (with Doubleday and Company) letter to Spaatz, 6 June 1960, and James Perkins (with Holt, Rinehart and Winston) letter to Spaatz, 25 April 1962, both in Spaatz papers, Box II: 12, Publishing Projects folder, Library of Congress, and Mets, *Master of Airpower*, 333-34.

17. Mets, *Master of Airpower*, 334. Mets further suggests that Spaatz got considerable help from his staff with the articles he wrote between the end of World War II and his retirement; this is a valid supposition, but he offers no evidence to substantiate it.
18. Carl A. Spaatz, "Strategic Air Power: Fulfillment of a Concept," *Foreign Affairs* (April 1946): 388-89, 392.
19. Carl Spaatz, "The Era of Air-Power Diplomacy," *Newsweek* (20 September 1948): 26.
20. See, for example, Carl Spaatz, "Gambling With U. S. Security," *Newsweek* (5 December 1949): 20; and Carl Spaatz, "More Men, Carriers, Planes - Now!" *Newsweek* (17 July 1950): 19.
21. James Parton, *Air Force Spoken Here: General Ira Eaker and the Command of the Air* (Bethesda, Md.: Adler and Adler, 1986), 17-26, 28-30.
22. Ibid, 86-87.
23. Ibid, 218-22; Arnold, *Global Mission*, 393-97; Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 2, *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949; repr., Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 301-304; Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power*, 148-49.
24. Frederick R. Neely, "Mission Completed," *Collier's* (21 June 1947): 79.
25. Parton, *Air Force Spoken Here*, 455-56, 469-73.
26. National Air Council, *The National Air Review* (January 1950): inside back cover; 19 July and 26 July 1949 letters, Eaker to H.H. Arnold, Eaker Papers, Box I: 29, LOC.
27. For example, in 1947 and 1948 he gave only two speeches each year, and in 1949 he gave only three, two of which were before military audiences; see List of Speeches, 1946-58 folder, and Speeches 1957-61 folder, both Box II: 108, Eaker Papers, LOC.
28. Parton, *Air Force Spoken Here*, 473-76; the Eaker Papers, LOC, contain copies of most of Eaker's columns in Boxes II: 89-91.
29. See, for example, his 10 May 1947 speech to University of Southern California Alumni Association, 7-8; 28 January 1946 NBC Radio interview, 3; and undated radio interview with "Mr. Lawton" (context indicates 1946), 3-4, all in Eaker Papers, Box II: 108, Speeches, 1946-49 folder, LOC.

30. See, for example, 19 July 1955 script for television show *For Your Information*, Speeches, 1954-56 folder, Box II: 108; columns "The RS-70 Controversy," February 1962, "Defense Potential Appraised," 8 March 1962, and "Deterrence Versus Stalemate," 28 February 1963, Box II: 89; and 28 February speech at Purdue University, Speeches, February to April 1964 folder, Box II: 109, all Eaker Papers, LOC.

31. Curtis E. LeMay, with MacKinlay Kantor, *Mission With LeMay* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1965), 15, 41-47. LeMay's memoirs are supplemented by a biography, Thomas M. Coffey, *Iron Eagle: The Turbulent Life of General Curtis LeMay* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1986).

32. Coffey, *Iron Eagle*, 218-20, 222-23.

33. LeMay, *Mission With LeMay*, 523-27.

34. Box A-1, Bartlett folder; Box A-3, Lay folder; Box A-5, Stewart folder; all in LeMay Papers, Library of Congress, hereafter cited as LeMay Papers, LOC.

35. See, for example, 2 May, 24 May 1949, 25 March 1954, and 21 March 1955 letters, Lay to LeMay, Box A-3, Lay folder; 30 March 1948 letter, Bartlett to LeMay, Box A-1, Bartlett folder, both LeMay Papers, LOC; Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts and Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978), 168-69.

36. 22 December 1952 letter, Godfrey to LeMay, Box A-3, Godfrey folder, LeMay Papers, LOC.

37. See, for example, two articles on LeMay that seem to make him, SAC, and nuclear bombing almost synonymous: William Bradford Huie, "The A-Bomb General of Our Armed Forces," *Coronet* (October 1950): 87-91; and Ernest Havemann, "Toughest Cop of the Western World," *Life* (14 June 1954): 132-47.

38. Alexander P. de Seversky, *Air Power: Key to Survival* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), xv, citations appear in photo section between pages xvi and xvii.

39. Ibid, 9-10. This was independent of, and unrelated to, the U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey being conducted at the same time.

40. Alexander P. de Seversky, "Atomic Bomb Hysteria," *Reader's Digest* (February 1946): 121-26.

41. Robert Littell, "What the Atom Bomb Would Do to Us," *Reader's Digest* (May 1946): 125-28; de Seversky, *Air Power*, 131-34.

42. Phillip S. Meilinger, "Proselytiser and Prophet: Alexander P. de Seversky and American Airpower," in John Gooch, *Airpower: Theory and Practice* (London: Frank

Cass, 1995), 24; characteristically, de Seversky claimed BOMC had offered to feature his book but then reneged when he refused to change his prediction that the Korean War would be a long war.

43. De Seversky, *Air Power*, 140, 158-59, 197-98.
44. Ibid, 1-2, 15-19, 242, 280-81.
45. Ibid, 183-93.
46. Alexander P. de Seversky, "World War III and How to Win it," *Coronet* (January 1955): 116-21.
47. Meilinger, "Proselytiser and Prophet," 27-28; Alexander P. de Seversky, "World War III and How to Win It," *Coronet* (January 1955): 116-21.
48. Ann Evory, ed., *Contemporary Authors: New Revision Series*, vol. 7 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1982), 238-39.
49. William Bradford Huie, *The Fight For Air Power* (New York: L. B. Fischer, 1942), unpaginated flyleaf, 4-13, 121-26; William Bradford Huie, *The Case Against the Admirals: Why We Must Have a Unified Command* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1946), 21-23. In this latter work Huie states that the authorship of *The Fight For Air Power* was supposed to include "with Colonel Hugh J. Knerr" but that the War and Navy departments were so upset by the book's contents that they recalled Knerr to active duty and ordered him to take his name off the book, *Case Against the Admirals*, 126-29.
50. Huie, *Case Against the Admirals*, 9-12.
51. William Bradford Huie, "The Facts Which Must Prevent War," *Reader's Digest* (January 1949): 25.
52. Huie, *Fight for Air Power*, 5-6.
53. *Contemporary Authors*, 238-39.
54. Beirne Lay, Jr., *I Wanted Wings* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), 23, 38; Beirne Lay, Jr. and Sy Bartlett, *Twelve O'clock High!* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1948), frontpiece.
55. Lay, *I Wanted Wings*, 316-17; Steven J. Rubin, *Combat Films: American Realism, 1945-1970* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 1981), 123-24.
56. Beirne Lay, Jr., *I've Had It: The Survival of a Bomb Group Commander* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), 1-2, 12, 39-44; James H. Farmer, *Celluloid Wings: The Impact of Movies on Aviation* (Blue Ridge Summit, Pa.: Tab Books, 1984), 146, 270.

57. Rubin, *Combat Films*, 126-28; Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 267-71. A minor technical point concerns the titles of the novel and the movie that resulted from it: while they both share the same title, the novel's title ends in an exclamation point which was dropped from the movie's title.

58. Ibid, 270-72; Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 82-84; Air Power League, *Report to the Members of the Air Power League* (New York: n.p., 1946), 18.

59. LeMay papers, container A-3, Lay folder, LOC.

60. Richard Gertner, *International Motion Picture Almanac* (New York: Quigley Publishing, 1975), 15.

61. Rubin, *Combat Films*, 124-28.

62. LeMay Papers, container A-1, Bartlett folder, LOC; Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 168-69.

63. Clare D. Kinsman, ed., *Contemporary Authors: Permanent Series* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1967), 258-59.

64. Ibid, 259.

65. William Wister Haines, *Command Decision* [play] (New York: Random House, 1947), iv, vii; *Contemporary Authors*, 259.

66. Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 71-72, 82-83.

67. Ibid, 82-83; Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 259-61; Air Power League, *Report to Members*, inside cover, 14-18.

68. *Webster's American Military Biographies* (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1978), 58.

69. Milton Caniff, *Milton Caniff's Steve Canyon* (Princeton, Wis.: Kitchen Sink Press, 1988), 99-100; Milton Caniff, *In Formosa's Dire Straits* (Princeton, Wis.: Kitchen Sink Press, 1989), 9.

70. Caniff, *Milton Caniff's Steve Canyon*, 62-73.

71. Ibid, 53; for comic strip characters based on Air Force acquaintances see Milton Caniff Collection, The Ohio State Cartoon Research Library, hereafter cited as MCC/OSU, Peggy Vincent and Clinton M. Vincent file, Phil Cochran file, and McCallister file.

72. Milton Caniff, "Steve Canyon and Me," *Collier's* (20 November 1948): 36; LeMay, *Mission With LeMay*, 35-36; for reasons for protests see letters, Caniff to MacKinlay

Kantor, 2 March 1951, and Kantor to Caniff, 27 April 1951, both in LeMay file, MCC/OSU.

73. For Caniff's popularity and impact see Bill Blackbeard's comments in Milton Caniff, *Steve Canyon Meets the Copperhead* (Concord, Calif.: Comic Art Publishing, 1977), unpaginated introduction, and R. C. Harvey's comments in Milton Caniff, *Steve Canyon Meets Deen Wilderness* (Concord, Calif.: Comic Art Publishing, 1978), unpaginated introduction, and in Milton Caniff, *Steve Canyon Meets Maid Nine and Convoy* (Concord, Calif.: Comic Art Publishing, 1978), unpaginated introduction.
74. Caniff, *S. C. Meets Copperhead*, 80; Milton Caniff, *Steve Canyon Meets Happy Easter* (Concord, Calif.: Comic Art Publishing, 1977), 64.
75. Milton Caniff, *Damna Exile* (Princeton, Wis.: Kitchen Sink Press, 1991), 26-29, 66.
76. Arnold file, Vandenberg file, Doolittle file, and miscellaneous file TM P82; 49, all in MCC/OSU; James H. Straubel, *Crusade for Airpower: The Story of the Air Force Association* (Washington, D.C.: Aerospace Education Foundation, 1982), 226, 402; *Who's Who in America*, 44th ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Marquis Who's Who, 1987), 432.
77. Arthur Godfrey, "This is My Story," *Saturday Evening Post* (24 December 1955): 21, 58; *Who's Who in America*, 38th ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Marquis Who's Who, 1975), 1159; Richard Gertner, *International Motion Picture Almanac* (New York: Quigley Publishing, 1975), 84.
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80. Godfrey, "This is My Story," 21, 58-59.
81. Ibid, 59; LeMay, *Mission With LeMay*, 488-89; Thomas M. Coffey, *Iron Eagle: The Turbulent Life of General Curtis LeMay* (New York: Crown Publishing, 1986), 326.
82. 22 December 1952 letter, Godfrey to LeMay, Box A-3, Godfrey folder, LeMay Papers, LOC.
83. Godfrey, "This is My Story," 20-21, 61.

84. Bill Davidson, "Arthur Godfrey and His Fan Mail," *Collier's* (2 May 1953): 11-13.

85. 27 February 1953 wire International News Service to LeMay, Box A-3, Godfrey folder, LeMay Papers, LOC.

86. See, for example, 2-8 April 1953 exchange of letters, LeMay and H. Leslie Atlass (of CBS) regarding a speech to the Executives' Club of Chicago that was later broadcast on CBS Television, and transcript of December 1953 article in *Aviation Age* regarding a 19 November speech to the Dallas Council on World Affairs, both Box A-3, Godfrey folder, LeMay Papers, LOC. The latter, incidentally, leads off with the statement, "UNEXPECTED HOTFOOT was administered to U.S. Navy by Commander Arthur Godfrey, USNR...."

87. Letters from LeMay to Godfrey dated 22 May, 25 May, 29 July, and 16 September 1953, 24 March, 15 April 1954, 13 June 1956, and 23 June 1958; exchange of letters Godfrey and Ralph Cordiner, 5 June and 3 July 1958, all in Box A-3, Godfrey folder, LeMay Papers, LOC.

88. Gerard Molyneaux, *James Stewart: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 1-4.

89. Ibid, 14-16; Joseph Wechsberg, "Target: Hollywood," *Collier's* (5 April 1947): 13, 47, 49.

90. See, for example, Stewart's 28 July and 9 August 1956 letters to LeMay, and LeMay's 24 December 1952 and 4 October 1957 letters to Stewart, Box A-5, Stewart folder, LeMay Papers, LOC.

91. Straubel, *Crusade for Airpower*, 34; Air Force Association, *Air Force* (October 1946): 4.

92. Numerous letters 13 October 1952 through 21 May 1954, between Lay and LeMay, but especially 13 October and 14 December 1952, Box A-3, Lay folder, and 23 and 24 December 1952 letters between Stewart and LeMay, Box A-5, Stewart folder, both in LeMay Papers, LOC; Molyneaux, *Stewart*, 121.

93. Stephen Pendo, *Aviation in the Cinema* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1985), 265; Michael Paris, *From Wright Brothers to Top Gun: Aviation, Nationalism and Popular Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 187.

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CHAPTER 4

AIR POWER'S ARMIES: ADVOCACY GROUPS

Just as individuals played a critical part in the crusade to convert America to the cause of air power, groups also played a central role. When considering groups, though, one faces dilemmas similar to those faced when examining individuals. Whom does one consider? Who should be excluded? Some groups, like the Air Power League, are easily defined and clearly constitute an organization formed solely to advance air power. Other groups are not so easily defined nor is their purpose clearly, or even directly, linked to the cause of air power. Editors and publishers, for example, form an amorphous group many of whom do not fit the category of air power advocate. But because they collectively held the power to decide what millions of Americans read, and since several publicly identified themselves with air power advocacy in some way, they deserve passing notice when outlining groups that put so much air power material before the public through the medium of popular culture. Some of the groups considered in this chapter, therefore, cannot be considered "air power groups" in the strictest sense of the phrase, but because a significant and identifiable number of their members were instrumental in transmitting the air power message to the public, their role is part of this study. In the course of analysis, however, their exact relationship with the air power movement will be considered.

THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

Not surprisingly, the U.S. Air Force was active in the popular culture campaign for air power in many ways and at many levels. Much of this activity was of an official nature. On numerous occasions Air Force leaders wrote articles, gave interviews, or delivered speeches that put their thoughts on air power before large segments of the general public. The Air Force also provided movie studios with technical support that often meant the difference between whether a film would be made or not. Finally, the Air Force Public Relations Office acted as a critical liaison between Air Force officials and the various media, and one of its chief concerns was presenting the best view of both the Air Force and air power. Much of the help given to the air power cause, though, was unofficial, for many Air Force members maintained old friendships or formed new ones and through this channel provided ideas and information to writers that helped shape their conception of air power. In this section we will not explore every example of Air Force involvement in the popular culture campaign, but instead lay out some patterns of that involvement.

Military leaders are always in demand with many groups as speakers at official, unofficial, and semi-official functions, and Air Force leaders are no exception. A search through any Air Force leader's papers quickly reveals that the officer made countless speeches before groups ranging from military and veterans organizations to civic groups large and small. In many cases, either by personal choice or by request, the officer spoke on topics that extolled the capabilities of air power. Often the speech reached beyond the audience if its text was reprinted by the print media or rebroadcast by radio. For example, in the summer of 1947 Carl Spaatz gave a series of speeches in California, all of which

were picked up for broadcast over network radio. In these speeches he stressed themes of strategic bombing's success in World War II, current Air Force weakness, and the need for a strong strategic force for deterrence.¹ Air Force leaders were also asked to write pieces which appeared in various magazines or newspapers across the country. Here too they frequently chose or were asked to write on the benefits and promise of air power. For example, in 1951 Air Force Chief of Staff Hoyt S. Vandenberg wrote an article for *The Saturday Evening Post* in which he stated that air defense could not protect America from a Soviet nuclear attack, and that the only hope was to deter such an attack through a strong strategic bombing force.² The fact that Air Force leaders spoke or wrote about air power is not surprising, and many who heard or read their words realized the message came from a biased, and perhaps partisan, source and took the message "with a grain of salt." But for many others in the audience the officer's stature only added strength to the message and thus these speeches and articles became part of the popular culture campaign that sought to advance the cause of air power.

Air Force leaders were also considered by the news media and other groups as points of contact for information about air power. Air Force generals were frequently interviewed by the media or asked to comment on defense issues of the day. They were even asked to comment on controversial statements made by other prominent figures. For example, when Arthur Godfrey, in a 1953 International News Service interview, made some harsh statements about Congress' failure to speed B-52s into full production, the INS asked Curtis LeMay, then commander of the Strategic Air Command, to comment publicly about Godfrey's charges.³ Air Force leaders were also often asked by various

groups across the country to provide information about air power's capabilities, information which these groups then disseminated to their members. Both the Air Power League and the American Legion relied heavily on information provided through their connection with Air Force leaders, and LeMay received many requests from civic groups to provide films about strategic bombing and American air power.⁴

The Air Force's public relations office, which went by several names throughout the period, also contributed to the effort to "sell" the public on both the Air Force and air power, though in a "behind-the-scenes" manner. The most common means of subtly shaping the Air Force's image came through its role in disseminating official statements and news releases. Perhaps the most effective way the public relations office influenced public imagination, though, was through its work with Hollywood. For a film project to receive official support from the Air Force, it had to go through the Air Force public relations office. The approval process, however, often involved script changes if the Air Force objected to how it was portrayed. With the costs of making any movie about the Air Force being prohibitively high, film makers often felt compelled to go along with public relations office suggestions to ensure Air Force approval.⁵ Public Affairs was not simply content to wait for a studio to approach the Air Force with a movie project. If it found a book that reflected well on the Air Force or if it felt the need for public awareness of an Air Force problem the Public Affairs office would circulate word among the studios that the Air Force would undoubtedly support such a film project. This was the case with both *The Hunters*, based on James Salter's 1956 novel by the same title, and the 1951 film *Air Cadets*.⁶ Once the film had been approved for official support a member of the public

relations office served as technical advisor to coordinate Air Force aid and to ensure no changes were made that would reflect badly on the service. The whole issue of military support, though, was fraught with potential for abuse. Beirne Lay had been working for at least six months on *Strategic Air Command* and had received a great deal of help from various Air Force commanders and organizations when he commented to Curtis LeMay that the studio still had not requested official Air Force sponsorship.⁷ In the early sixties the Defense Department tried to clean up such potential for abuse but to no avail when it came to the Air Force. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Arthur Sylvester turned down Sy Bartlett's request for support for *A Gathering of Eagles*, stating it was "simply another Air Force public relations movie." When LeMay, by now Air Force Chief of Staff, heard of this he wrote a memo to Sylvester, an aide hand-delivered it, and Sylvester granted approval "almost instantly."⁸

Another way the public relations office reached the public at the grassroots level with their air power message was to send packages to local public relations officers at bases across the country outlining ways they could get their message to the surrounding community. Suggested efforts included programs on local radio stations, getting air power related stories into local newspapers, and arranging for base "open house" days.⁹ The packages included scripts, advertisements, and announcements for use on radio stations, sample speeches for the base commander, even a sample proclamation for local government officials to use in expressing support. The public relations office even tried to ensure that Air Force personnel were sufficiently airminded. In a 1947 "Guide For Discussion Leaders" intended for small group discussions as part of a "Troop Information

Program," the group leader was instructed to cover such topics as the concept behind strategic bombing and to instruct the troops on the nature of air power.¹⁰

The Air Force also gave unofficial support to the popular culture crusade, though because of its informal basis the full magnitude of this aid is hard to measure. Invariably this form of help came through contacts which air power enthusiasts and people in the media maintained with people in the Air Force. The help and encouragement that LeMay gave to such figures as Beirne Lay, Sy Bartlett, and Jimmy Stewart, as well as his role in converting Arthur Godfrey to the cause of air power has already been cited, but it sets the pattern for many more such instances. Through Lay's correspondence with LeMay one can see that Lay also received help from many other contacts he maintained with friends still on active duty. This help ranged from getting ideas and comments from B-36 crewmembers for his *Strategic Air Command* script to arranging for SAC briefings for civilians working with him on his various projects.¹¹ William Bradford Huie, too, stated that he gained many of his insights on air power from his close contacts with Air Force members.¹² Journalists' views on air power were also partly shaped by their informal contacts with members of the Air Force. Noted military commentator Stewart Alsop's appreciation for air power was in part shaped by the top secret information he received from Hoyt Vandenberg and Lauris Norstad.¹³

THE AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION

The most visible civilian group associated with the cause of air power was the Air Force Association. The Association was formed in January 1946, but its roots go back to

the last years of World War II. Realizing that the war's end would see millions of AAF veterans returned to civilian life, Arnold wanted an organization that would draw these veterans into a unified group working to advance air power. He detailed Assistant Chief of Staff for Personnel, Fred Anderson, to recommend guidelines for such an organization. Anderson made his report in August 1945. Organizing efforts began in October 1945 when a dozen AAF veterans, including Jimmy Doolittle and Jimmy Stewart, met to lay the groundwork for the Association. Carl Spaatz, then Vice Chief of Staff of the AAF and a Colonel Robert E.L. Eaton of AAF headquarters sat in on this meeting as observers. The Association was formally incorporated on 4 February 1946. The Air Force Association was open to any and all AAF veterans and its first president, Jimmy Doolittle, enunciated the group's close ties to the AAF despite the fact that it had no official ties to the service: “[the Association] was created for the benefit of its members and the Air Force they served so loyally.” While active duty AAF personnel could join as associate members, they could not vote on Association matters nor hold any office. The group's organization called for local, state, and regional chapters along with the national office, and it planned outreach activities that included a monthly magazine and educational programs.¹⁴

The Association's main means of disseminating its message was its magazine, *Air Force*, but it used other methods as well. *Air Force* began publication in July 1946 as the official journal of the Air Force Association, but it too had deeper roots. The Air Service published a monthly newsletter starting in 1917 and this newsletter continued almost uninterrupted until the early days of World War II. Throughout these years the newsletter served as an in-house means of disseminating information throughout the Air Service and

the Air Corps. In December 1942 Arnold transformed the newsletter into what he described to its new editor, James Straubel, as “A first-class, slick paper magazine - highly readable...with worldwide circulation.” This “slick paper magazine” continued until 1946 when the Air Force Association took over its publication. Recognizing the long continuity stretching back to 1917, the Association began its publication as Volume 29.¹⁵ Leading AFA figures spread the group’s message in speeches and radio broadcasts, particularly on special occasions such as Air Force Day, AFA conventions, and at premieres of air power movies. On Air Force Day, 1 August 1947, for example Jack Warner, a member of the Association’s board of directors and head of Warner Brothers Studio, hosted a radio program featuring such other Hollywood dignitaries as James Stewart and Ronald Reagan. Hosting premieres of such movies as *Command Decision* and *Strategic Air Command* brought the AFA additional opportunities to share its message. These occasions were made into gala affairs attended by military, entertainment, and business dignitaries and were frequently covered on radio and television. At the premiere of *Command Decision*, for example, the Association presented a “citation of honor” to the entire film industry for its support of air power. At the premiere of *Strategic Air Command* James Stewart was similarly honored with a special medal from the AFA, and Arthur Godfrey interviewed many of the attending celebrities for his popular television show. This recognition of the impact popular culture could have on winning support for air power is further illustrated by the group’s Arts and Letters award, which was first given in 1948 to William Wister Haines author of the play and novel *Command Decision*.¹⁶

Over the years the Association has gained a reputation for being a major force fighting for air power, but much of that effort has focused on the legislative and industrial levels, not on the popular culture level. The group sought grass-roots activity in the local community through the organization's squadrons scattered across the country. Planned squadron activities included speakers bureaus, aviation courses in public schools, model plane and glider activities, air shows, scholarships, and many other activities. While this sounds impressive, there are signs that the reality did not live up to the goal. Throughout most of the period covered by this study the AFA suffered from low membership and struggling local squadrons. Early enthusiasm brought in 158,000 members in the first three and a half years, but in that same period 88,000 dropped out. After an initial high point of 102,492 in 1948 membership dropped to 36,961 in 1951 and remained in the 36-40 thousand range until 1956 when it rose to 52,299, but lagged again, reaching only 55,640 by 1960.¹⁷ This problem with membership manifested itself in problems at the local squadron level. In 1948 the Association claimed units in over 200 communities, but by 1954 that figure was down to 109 squadrons and in 1960 it had risen to only 149. Moreover, a 1959 AFA survey found that many squadrons had fewer than 20 new members and that 13 squadrons had had their charters suspended for low membership.¹⁸ With the local units struggling, the emphasis of effort shifted even further toward its magazine as the group's main outreach for it was advertising revenues, mostly from industrial sources, that kept the Association solvent. After a rough start financially, the magazine soon recovered, especially after the start of the Korean War. By 1952

"advertising income was running far ahead of membership income." This financial imbalance continued throughout the Fifties and Sixties.¹⁹

Another category of membership brought industries into a closer relationship with the Association: Industrial Associate membership. Started in 1951 as a way to streamline industrial sponsorship of AFA special events such as annual conventions, the fee for this category of membership started out at \$350 for small firms and \$450 for large ones. By 1954 there were 108 industrial associates and by 1960 the figure was up to 379. The AFA, though, soon became a conduit for contact between the Air Force and industry. In 1954, for example, the Association set up a series of Command Conferences where Air Force, airline, government, industrial, and educational leaders briefed over 2300 senior corporate executives who attended the four conferences that year on various aspects of military and industrial needs. Again in 1957 the AFA held an Industrial Associate Day during their annual convention in Washington, D.C. where industry executives received briefings on such issues as government procurement and logistics.²⁰

None of this should lead to the conclusion that the Air Force Association did not take part in the campaign to convert average Americans to the cause of air power. While its membership troubles cast doubts on the effectiveness of its efforts, the Association was at least making some efforts, and undoubtedly they yielded results in many locations. Likewise, one should not minimize the significance of the Association's magazine, which is still in publication today, and it certainly carried the air power message to some people who might not otherwise have heard the air power gospel. By the same token, though, the magazine was not a mass-circulation periodical. It served a self-selected audience that

primarily comprised members of the Association and therefore did not reach the general population directly. All in all, while the Air Force Association's greatest success seems to have been in building support for air power on the legislative and industrial levels, it also made some, if indeterminate, contributions to the popular culture campaign as well.

THE AIR POWER LEAGUE and THE NATIONAL AIR COUNCIL

One of the most intriguing, but least known, air power advocacy groups was the Air Power League and its successor, the National Air Council. What little we know about the group comes from a number of hard-to-find pamphlets published by the Air Power League between 1945 and 1948 and a journal published by the National Air Council beginning in 1949 and running at least two years. Organized on 18 December 1944, and known through the late 1940s as the Air Power League, the group's board of directors, twenty-six in all, included such notable aircraft industry executives as Eddie Rickenbacker, Lawrence D. Bell, and Charles E. Wilson, but it also included news media figures like William Randolph Hearst, Jr. and Amon G. Carter, a Fort Worth area newspaper, radio, and television station owner. Furthermore, the board also boasted none other than movie star Clark Gable.²¹ The League set as its goals the standard litany of air power concerns shared in whole or in part by other groups: promote interest in, and the study of, air power in world affairs; educate the American public in the need for a strong national air power establishment to maintain peace; foster growth of civilian and commercial aviation. It sought to do this by making air power "the business of every American citizen," and to bring to the cause of air power "considerable weight of popular opinion and enthusiasm."²²

The group's first efforts went to setting up an organization to suit its purposes. Seeking a self-sustaining financial base, the League solicited charter members at \$500 per member and by the end of 1945 they had 305. The list of charter members reads like a "who's who" in America's aircraft industry, boasting over 130 names connected with various aircraft industries or businesses that could profit from advancing American aviation and air power. There are, however, numerous and significant exceptions. The list includes seventeen editors or publishers, including Walter D. Fuller, president of Curtis Publishing, the company that published the *Saturday Evening Post*, Henry R. Luce of *Time* and *Life* magazines, and Frank E. Gannett of Gannett Newspapers. Nine leading figures from the movie industry also appear as charter members, including Samuel Goldwyn, David O. Selznick, and Darryl F. Zanuck, along with four top administrators at such reknown research institutions as M.I.T. and the Mayo Clinic. Additionally, there are numerous figures from businesses that seem to have no connection with the flying world, such as Sears, Roebuck, Procter and Gamble, and General Mills. Furthermore, numerous private individuals became charter members ranging from Bernard Baruch and Clark Gable to Earl Brown, a Minnesota sheriff. Military figures are conspicuously absent from the list of charter members, for the League barred active-duty military members from joining in any capacity.²³

The League initially planned for a mass-membership national organization with regular membership dues set at \$5 a year, but by the end of 1945 it decided that such an organization was incompatible with the group's goals. The League estimated that this set-up would yeild 30,000 to 40,000 regular members who would be less committed to the

national headquarters program than the League desired. Furthermore, the membership would have a high turnover rate and most of the funds raised would be consumed by the administrative costs of maintaining membership and producing and mailing League material to such a large, scattered group of members. This seems a prescient observations for that is very close to what the Air Force Association experienced in trying to maintain its mass-membership organization. As an alternative, by the end of 1945 the League opted for a foundation-style organization where membership would be limited and cost a minimum of \$50 annually. Under this arrangement the national office would gain the bulk of its budget by soliciting corporate and philanthropic donations. With part of the money raised the League planned to establish local, independent, and self-directed Air Power Clubs, "community groups which will be the spearhead of air development in America." The clubs would then form "powerful state organizations" that would become part of the Air Power League. Suggested activities for the local groups included fostering local aviation improvements such as airport facilities and navigation aids, promoting aviation courses in primary and secondary schools and training "airminded youth," and sustaining community interest in aviation developments and the need for air power. The group claimed to have clubs already set up in Connecticut, Tennessee, and Wisconsin, with work progressing in several other states. To support and foster the local clubs the League hired a Director of Field Organization, and planned to provide films, speakers, and scholarships to local members. The bulk of the funds raised by the national office would then be freed for funding research, granting scholarships and fellowships, commissioning books, and disseminating informational materials.²⁴

A key insight into the League's thinking can be seen in its relationship to the AAF and the Navy. When it was organized in 1944 the League originally called itself the Air Force League, which led the public and prospective members to suspect that the group was merely advancing military aviation and especially the AAF. Since the group wished to focus "not only upon the size and efficiency of our air forces in being but upon our air transport systems, community flying facilities and the total airmindedness of our people," and because the League wished to "concern itself with virtually all phases of aviation - land-based and seaborne air arms, research, and civil and commercial development in various aspects," the group changed its name to better project its goals to the public.²⁵ The League seems, in early 1946, to have genuinely sought a non-partisan position between the AAF and the Navy. For example, it listed among its major policy objectives encouraging research and development in fields important to both military and naval air power, it claimed both AAF and Navy personnel on its list of speakers, and it promised to make both AAF and Navy technical and training material available to local Air Power Clubs.²⁶ Trouble arose over one of its other policies, though. On 20 November 1945 the League's executive committee adopted a resolution calling for a unified military establishment with co-equal Army, Navy, and Air Force. The decision was endorsed by 22 of the group's 27 directors; three opposed the measure and two abstained. The League's president, head of General Electric Charles E. Wilson, claimed in his report to the members that this decision prompted the Navy to officially withdraw its endorsement of the League because, as Wilson saw it, the Navy opposed unification and saw the group's resolution as favoring the AAF over the Navy.²⁷

The League reasserted its non-partisan stance, but a sudden change in the tenor of its statements appeared by the end of the year. In a September “report to the people of the United States” the League stated that peace could only be assured through air power, and concluded:

[t]hus air power has essentially superseded the older defense arms. Armies and navies are merely time-bound auxiliaries; they serve only to support the great air armadas which will determine the outcome of any conflict.”

The report continues by stating that the AAF’s plan for a 70-group air force is too small and it detailed what the group considered to be the optimum organization for the AAF. Overall, the report adhered so closely to what many air power advocates and AAF leaders were saying for and about the AAF that the League felt constrained to include a disclaimer that their report did not reflect official AAF policy.²⁸

Sometime before 1948 the Air Power League changed its name to the National Air Council and dramatically altered its approach to advancing air power. Still organized as a non-profit foundation and still seeking corporate and organizational contributions, it now set \$500 as the minimum annual contribution and gave certain minor privileges that went along with becoming an “accredited Company Member.” Examples of privileges included being listed in the Council’s periodic roster of company members and company executives receiving free copies of the Council’s journal. Individuals could still join the Council, and minimum annual dues remained at \$50. Another indicator of strong continuity between the two groups is that fully 75% of the League’s officers and directors, 24 out of 32, remained as the Council’s officers, or on its Executive Board of Managers and Board of Governors. New additions to the Council’s leadership include Thomas K. Finletter, who

had served as head of the President's Air Policy Commission in 1947 and would soon be Secretary of the Air Force, Sumner Sewall, former governor of Maine, and Ira Eaker.²⁹ The Council's goals and objectives remained much the same as the League's, except that by 1950 the Council had toned down its strident anti-Navy rhetoric, though it still retained a noticeable Air Force bias. The Council also balanced its military air power emphasis with considerable material on civilian, commercial, and industrial aviation.

The biggest change was the scope of the Council's activities. First, and foremost, its main means of outreach became its journal, *The National Air Review*, which appeared monthly except July, August, and December. The journal published a few original articles, written by Council executives, but the bulk of its material was reprints from aviation, trade, and military journals with an occasional article from popular magazines. Outside of the monthly list of affiliated organizations and the periodic list of company members, there was no advertising. The appearance and content of this publication is decidedly one of a special-interest journal rather than a mass-circulation or general-interest magazine, and the tone of its material was technical, bureaucratic, and intellectual as opposed to some of the League's more inflammatory statements. Along these same lines, the other big difference in the Council's activities is that it severely curtailed its grass-roots outreach program. There is no mention of local Air Power Clubs or state organizations. Instead, it sought to "serve as an objective source of information for newspaper editors and writers, government representatives, magazine editors, radio commentators, educators and others influential in moulding public opinion" as well as reaching out to "community leaders, Chamber of Commerce members, municipal officials, local aviation representatives, teachers, and

others who can do much to advance the cause of American air progress.” In short, it became a special interest pressure group similar to the Air Force Association. The group did provide a film library for distributing aviation films to schools, clubs, and civic groups, but this limited service hardly compares to the bold outreach plans of the Air Power League.³⁰ The group also funded research and gave awards to military members, and it sponsored a series of lectures in conjunction with the Library of Congress, but here too the scope of outreach, by the very nature of the activities, was limited.³¹

In the grand scheme of things the Air Power League and the National Air Council seem to have played little more than a cameo role in the popular culture crusade. They did not even get their Warholian “fifteen minutes of fame,” but the groups’ few publications suggest several observations. First and foremost, judging by the League’s list of directors and charter members, many leading Americans with no apparent vested interest felt strongly enough about advancing the cause of air power through a public information campaign that they were willing to give a considerable sum of money to have a strong voice in the League’s efforts. While roughly 130 of the group’s 305 charter members had an obvious stake in promoting air power, that leaves roughly 170 who did not. Most important in this regard is the relatively large number of charter members who occupied an important place in shaping public attitudes. Publishers such as Hearst, Luce, and Gannett controlled much of the news people read. Movie producers such as Mayer, Goldwyn, Selznick, and Zanuck controlled not only the movies they personally produced but also the production companies they controlled or helped run. The heads of M.I.T. and the Mayo Clinic lent an intellectual veneer to any pronouncements the League made concerning air

power. The fact that these persons felt this strongly about “selling air power” through the League’s efforts lends credence to the supposition that the pro-air power material they disseminated through their own channels was directed toward the same goal.

The League’s sudden break with the Navy provides another illustrative point. The group’s early pronouncements seem to reflect a sincere desire to foster both land-based and sea-borne air power. Its endorsement of unification may have prompted the Navy to revoke its endorsement of the group’s activities as Wilson claimed. It could also have been prompted by a subtle shift in League activities or pronouncements or those of its members that may not have been apparent to the League itself. The fact that in only seven months the League went from a seemingly heartfelt desire to promote both AAF and naval aviation to a decidedly strident anti-Navy position lends credence to the latter explanation. More to the point, though, we see in this episode, as we saw with William Bradford Huie and Arthur Godfrey, the trend that supporting air power tended to draw people and groups away from earlier connections with, or support for, the Navy and into the position that only land-based air power represented true air power. That the Council distanced itself from the earlier attacks on the Navy does not negate this perception. Despite the presence of Admiral Emory S. Land, on the Council’s Board of Governors - Land’s affiliation may have been more a result of his position as president of the Air Transport Association than his connection with the Navy - the Council continued to emphasize land-based air power and gave little attention to naval air power issues.

Finally, both groups’ obscurity makes a couple of points in its own right. First, it illustrates the diversity within the air power advocates’ popular culture crusade. At a time

when other groups and individuals were making their own unique contributions through many channels, a group of “airminded” individuals perceived a need for a grassroots movement organized solely around the idea of fighting for air power at the national, state, and local levels, and they formed the Air Power League. Their pamphlets may or may not have reached many people, but their main effort was intended to be a face-to-face “each one reach one” approach to spreading the gospel of air power. To what extent they succeeded in this oral campaign may be lost forever in the mists of time, but for the purposes of this study it is important enough to note that one group made a formal effort to organize and educate the masses - to reach their “hearts and minds” as it were.

The fact that they failed in this grass-roots effort and sank into near-oblivion points to a second, and perhaps most important, observation. Perhaps the sole *raison d'être* of advancing air power was not enough to hold a grassroots movement together. The League sought to establish a service organization complete with clubhouses and regular meetings,³² but it was to be a service organization with only one narrow-focused service to perform. It saw the nucleus of the local clubs coming from Civil Air Patrol members, air veterans, and airminded business and professional leaders,³³ but all of these groups had alternative service group options to turn to that offered wider or more tangible options for service. The Civil Air Patrol was an official Air Force auxiliary and performed peacetime disaster relief and search-and-rescue missions, so its members had an existing organization with a vital real-world mission.³⁴ Air veterans had the Foreign Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars as options, and as we shall see, one of those options, the Foreign Legion, gave them the opportunity to fight for air power through Legion channels. If this was not

enough air power association for air veterans they had the Air Force Association, an organization that gained in appeal and organizational resiliency through its close ties to the AAF and later, the Air Force. Finally, business and professional leaders had the Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce, and other clubs to chose from, and each one offered a wider focus than just fighting for air power.

The idea of the Air Power Clubs does not seem to have caught on with the general public and what few clubs that were formed seem to have disappeared over time. The disappearance of the clubs may have been hastened by the abandonment of the club idea when the League evolved into the Coucil, or more likely, the Council dropped all mention of the clubs because the club movement had already died out. In either case, this left a national organization composed only of a select group of prominent individuals who, through the Council managed to keep the League's ideals and goals alive for a few more years, but each of these individuals had other options for advancing the cause of air power. One of the members of the Council's Board of Governors, Ira Eaker, voiced a growing frustration at the Council's inability to do anything significant in winning popular support, and was beginning to consider other organizations as options for more effective efforts.³⁵ Part of Eaker's frustration seems to stem from unrealistic expectations, and this points to a fundamental flaw in the air power crusade. Not satisfied with widespread basic support, some of the early air power advocates expected their cause to generate an army of zealots who would dedicate their entire lives to air power as they themselves had. There is no proof as to why the Air Power League and the National Air Council ultimately disappeared, but air power advocates as a whole, like other revolutionaries, found that

while a cause may breed widespread support, only a small percentage of those who support the cause will openly agitate for it, and only a precious few will make the cause the main focus of their lives.

THE AMERICAN LEGION

That the American Legion fought for issues it considered essential to national defense in the Cold War era is hardly a revelation. The fact that it took up the cause of air power, though, may come as a surprise to some. Since its inception in 1919 the Legion has not only consistently advocated its policies on military issues, it has been one of the most successful military pressure groups.³⁶ Thus the Legion's efforts to advance air power, though not directed entirely toward the same goals as other air power advocates, nevertheless brought a powerful and established advocacy group to the crusade to convert the American public to faith in air power and forms an interesting facet of this study.

What is known of the Legion's air power advocacy comes, as with the Air Power League, solely from what few pamphlets are available that were part of their campaign. Histories of the Legion give little attention to its efforts on behalf of air power, and none give any details of the air power pamphlet campaign or mention the pamphlets produced to conduct it. This in itself is an important caveat. As interesting as the Legion's air power campaign was, it was not the Legion's major effort, nor does it indicate that the Legion as a whole favored air power over land or sea power, for it did not. The Legion had a long history of supporting stronger air forces stretching back to the Legion's

inception, but it saw a strong air force as an integral part of a strong national defense and it advocated the former in an effort to achieve the latter.³⁷

Still, looking at its air power pamphlets one could easily get the impression that the Legion had gone whole-heartedly over to the side of air power. Two pamphlets from 1947 prominently display a motto popular with the Air Force and air power advocates through much of the Forties, "Air Power is Peace Power," and one states flatly that "until the United Nations can assure world peace your security rests primarily on our strength in the air." Another pamphlet from 1949 tells the reader, "Air Power is the primary weapon of modern security," while one from 1954 quotes Reichsmarschal Hermann Goering and Rear Admiral Toshitane Takata of the Japanese Navy to the effect that air power had been the decisive weapon in World War II and then quotes President Eisenhower: "...but you and I can logically deduce that we must have adequate [air] force-in-being the day war begins - or we will have no need for any other."³⁸ Perhaps the emphasis on air power in the early pamphlets stems from the fact that Eddie Rickenbacker served as chairman of the Legion's Aeronautics Committee from 1946 to 1947. Rickenbacker's connection with air power since his days as America's leading ace in World War I are well known. He frequently spoke to groups and the press advocating air power throughout the interwar and postwar period, he was long-time head of Eastern Airlines, and he was a charter member of the Air Power League, served on its Board of Directors, and continued with the National Air Council on its Board of Governors. Rickenbacker's role in instigating the Legion's air power pamphlets, though, would at best have been indirect because the pamphlets were issued by the Legion's National Defense Division and its successor after

1947, the National Security Commission. Furthermore, the pamphlets continued into 1954, seven years after Rickenbacker's tenure as head of the Aeronautics Committee.³⁹

All of the Legion's air power pamphlets but one have the same look, "feel," and message. They are skillfully produced with eye-catching illustrations, bright colors, and short, screaming headlines. The text is non-technical but intelligent, and the writing style is smooth and energetic. The overall effect is a pamphlet that would appeal to the general public, which undoubtedly it was designed to do. The message is remarkably consistent despite spanning an eight year period. Air power is depicted as the only defense against the perils that confronted America, and in all pamphlets the Soviet Union appears as the premier threat. The Legion consistently went into great detail to convey the philosophy that air power is more than just Air Force planes. First, it was generally even-handed with the Air Force and the Navy when it came to stressing needs, so much so that it confused the 1947 President's Air Policy Commission recommendation for a 70-group Air Force as a figure that applied to both the Air Force and Navy combined.⁴⁰ Secondly, the Legion stressed all the facets it felt went into making national air power. In this it was remarkably consistent with the image being put forward by other air power advocates. Air power is said to include all facets of flying, civilian, commercial, and military, but it also includes industrial potential, research and development, air age education in schools at all levels, and a thoroughly airminded society. Overall, the message presented is that for America to survive it must have strong air power, and to have strong air power it must have not only a strong Air Force and naval air arm, it must also mobilize all facets of American society - its industrial, social, economic, and intellectual resources.

If this was all there was to the pamphlet campaign it would be hard to argue that it was a grassroots effort to influence the public's view of air power, for there is no evidence to suggest that these pamphlets circulated widely among the general public. But there was one pamphlet that took an entirely different approach, one that sought to reach the entire population. In October 1947 the Legion published a pamphlet, *Keep America Strong in the Air*, that it sent out to all its organizations. The pamphlet billed itself as "Aids for COMMUNITY Action!" and "An Activities Handbook for Posts and Departments on The American Legion Air Power Program." This large pamphlet, 47 pages, not only outlined a comprehensive campaign to get the Legion's air power views into nearly every form of mass communication, it also gave sample texts for Legionnaires to use.⁴¹

Each department and Legion post was given pointed instructions on steps it should take to implement the program, and detailed instructions on how to accomplish the steps. The departments were asked to establish department Aeronautics Committees, headed by "an active aeronautically-informed chairman," and to set up Area, Division, and District Aeronautics Committees. The departments were also told to hold at least one statewide Aeronautics Conference each year, to form Aeronautics Speakers Committees, and to include at least one air power item in each edition of the department's publications. In detailing how to organize air power conferences the pamphlet urged, in bold print, that Legion officials should arrange for a U.S. senator or representative to serve as speaker, and if that was impossible they could make do with a governor, mayor, or state representative. It also covered how to arrange publicity to ensure maximum public attendance of these conferences and how to arrange radio coverage to help the speakers

reach an even larger audience. This pamphlet also states that every Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps air installation had been ordered to work closely with the Legion's Aeronautical Chairman and to provide speakers, films, and other "helpful material."⁴² Local posts were instructed to set up an Aeronautical Committee, "with a chairman who is thoroughly familiar with aeronautics," which would then educate speakers who would appear before community and civic groups and local schools and who would develop local radio programs. The posts were also told to monitor local newspapers and radio stations for adequate coverage of air power topics, to urge increased and prominent coverage of such topics, and to ask local advertisers and businesses to display the "Air Power is Peace Power" logo in advertisements and on stationary.⁴³

When it came to actually implementing these instructions the pamphlet offered a wealth of material to help individual Legionnaires get the "correct" word out to the general public. It suggested conducting community forums on air power, and instructed members on how to organize and advertise it, where to get materials and speakers, and gave suggested topics for discussion. To facilitate speaking on local radio stations, the pamphlet offered a full-text five-minute talk entitled "America is Losing the Race for Air Power," along with a staged 14 minute "interview," and ten spot announcements for various air power events. It also printed an outline for a twenty minute round-table discussion and questions for interviews. The questions are so leading, however, that one could not expect a frank exchange of opinion to occur. Some questions offered include: "Who or what was responsible for America taking a back seat in aviation progress after World War I?" "Has it been acknowledged by Axis and Allied leaders that Air Power is

the most powerful striking force in the world?" "Can a second-rate air force hope to win any future war?" and "What kind of a future does America face if it remains a third-rate Air Power?" For newspapers the pamphlet provided a text for announcing upcoming conferences, along with three sample editorials and three letters to editors. For public gatherings the pamphlet included a ten and fifteen minute speech suitable for general audiences or even radio, and it printed fourteen quotes suitable for any occasion.⁴⁴

In assessing the American Legion's air power campaign it is tempting to suggest that the program outlined in *Keep America Strong in the Air* proves that it actually carried out a wide-ranging crusade and that it reached millions of Americans across the country. This may be true, but there is no way to authoritatively assess its extent or impact on a national scale. One also wonders how enthusiastically local members who had served in the ground and non-flying naval forces in World War II reacted to this program and how enthusiastically they implemented it. Still, the Legion's pamphlet campaign, in general, illustrates the wider dimensions of the air power crusade, that is, that a group not normally associated with air power advocacy saw revolutionary potential in air power and took steps to convince the public of the virtues of air power. In a more specific sense, the public education program illustrates yet another facet of, and the wide applications within, the effort to conduct a grassroots advocacy movement through popular culture.

EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS, DIRECTORS AND PRODUCERS

Many air power advocates would have been powerless to get their message into the mainstream of popular culture if the people who controlled access to the media had

been unwilling to convey the air power message. Several of those media were controlled by the individuals considered in this section. Editors and publishers determined what appeared in much of the printed media in America, particularly magazines, newspapers, and books. Directors and producers decided what Americans would see on their movie screens. Certainly not all of the nation's editors, publishers, directors, and producers can be considered air power advocates, but a significant number proved consistently willing to present the air power message through the media in which they worked. Some may have done so for fairly innocuous reasons, such as a general concern for military preparedness, a desire to let all sides have their say, or even that they felt a particular story contained good drama that would draw patrons. Others, though, showed a pronounced tendency to push air power topics or maintained close ties to air power advocates or advocacy groups. The willingness to carry air power topics was such a pronounced trend that one author who attacked what he called the air power advocates' "solid wall of propaganda" claimed that newspaper and magazine editors would not accept for publication any piece that questioned air power.⁴⁵ While one should not assume that carrying an air power piece automatically made an editor, publisher, director, or producer an air power advocate, enough individuals gave indications of a favorable predisposition toward the air power popular culture crusade that the group as a whole warrants consideration.

One of the most obvious examples of this trend was William Bradford Huie. From 1945 to 1952 Huie was editor and publisher of the *American Mercury* and during that period he used his position to advance numerous arguments favoring air power, many of which he himself wrote. Alexander P. de Seversky, for example, frequently contributed to

the magazine. Huie's attitudes toward air power have already been discussed. He was an outspoken proponent of strategic air power and a harsh critic of the Navy, and throughout his tenure with *American Mercury*, he held the key position to project his views through a popular general interest magazine with a national readership.

While other editors and publishers may not have been as outspoken in their support for air power as was Huie, many showed their support in other ways. The list of charter members of the Air Power League, as well as the list of executives of the League and its successor the National Air Council, is a veritable treasure trove for anyone seeking to find behind-the-scenes air power advocacy within the print media. Several publishers of newspapers large and small, for example, affiliated with the League. Such figures include William Randolph Hearst, Jr., publisher of the *New York Journal-American* and head of the Hearst Corporation, Frank E. Gannett, of the Gannett newspapers group, and Eugene Meyer, editor and publisher of *The Washington Post*. The list of publishers and editors who became charter members bears inclusion to grasp its full magnitude.

Amon G. Carter, president of Carter Publications, a Fort Worth newspaper, radio and television conglomerate.

Gardner Cowles, Jr., president of *Des Moines Register and Tribune*

John Cowles, president of *Minneapolis Star Journal and Tribune*

Silliman Evans, president and publisher of *Tennessean Newspapers*

E. K. Gaylord, president of The Oklahoma Publishing Company

Louis Levand, publisher of *The Wichita Beacon*

Merrill C. Meigs, vice president of the Hearst Corporation

Marcellus M. Murdock, publisher of *The Wichita Eagle*

Carter, Gardner Cowles, Hearst, and Meigs all went beyond charter membership and served as executives for both the League and the Council. In addition, the *Tennessean* and *Des Moines Register and Tribune* made corporate donations to the League's

Foundation.⁴⁶ Such affiliation prompts speculation that these newspapers reflected their publishers' support for air power, but this can only be confirmed by a detailed study of each newspaper's editorial stance, which is beyond the scope of this study.

Publishers of some of the most popular general interest magazines were also represented among the supporters of the League and Council, and here support for air power can be demonstrated within the pages of their publications. For example, Walter D. Fuller, president of Curtis Publishing Company, the firm which published the *Saturday Evening Post*, was a charter member of the League, and his magazine ran numerous articles on air power throughout the interwar and postwar period. Henry R. Luce, owner of *Time* and *Life* magazines, was also a charter member, and his *Life* magazine made air power articles a regular feature. Finally, Gardner Cowles, president of the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*, was also president of *Look* magazine which regularly ran air power features. There are indications that the support for air power at *Look* went beyond Cowles. For example, a memo from Felix Jager attached to an advance copy of a 1947 article by Alexander de Seversky states that de Seversky had advocated long-range strategic bombing before 1940 and that only now are people recognizing his insight into "modern warfare."⁴⁷ None of this should lead one to believe that these magazines were wholly and exclusively devoted to advancing the cause of air power or that they favored the Air Force over the Army and the Navy. Virtually all of these magazines regularly ran articles on land and sea power, so much so that in 1949 H.H. Arnold complained to Ira Eaker that the *Saturday Evening Post* ran a Navy story in every issue, and Eaker agreed, noting that, "[i]t is practically a Navy magazine."⁴⁸ What this does illustrate, though, is

that the heads of three of the most popular magazines in America had signed on to the Air Power League's goal of getting the word about air power into the hands of every man, woman, and child in America, and these three magazines went a long way toward making that goal a reality in a consistent and effective manner throughout the period under study.

Much the same could be said about two other general interest magazines popular with the American public, *Collier's* and the *Reader's Digest*. The *Collier's* legacy of air power support began with the son of the magazine's founder, Robert J. Collier. Owner and long-time editor of the magazine, Collier was an avid flier, a friend of the Wright Brothers, and an early proponent of both aviation and air power. In 1911 he was concerned that the Army had only one airplane, so he bought a Wright-B flier and loaned it to the Army until it could find money enough to buy more. In 1911 he also established the Collier Trophy as an award to be given annually for outstanding achievement in aviation; the award often recognized advances in civilian aviation, but it also frequently went to such military figures as H.H. Arnold and Carl Spaatz for their advancement of air power.⁴⁹ While Collier died in 1918, his legacy was institutionalized in the magazine he left behind. Throughout the period *Collier's* consistently featured articles extolling advances in aviation and advocating greater reliance on air power.

One major force keeping *Collier's* active in air power advocacy was the part played by W.B. Courtney. During the interwar years Courtney served as the magazine's aviation editor. Not only did he edit the weekly feature "Wing Talk," he also wrote articles on aviation and air power that *Collier's* published on a regular basis. After the war Courtney became the magazine's European editor but continued to furnish a steady

supply of articles detailing advances in, or perceived problems with, American air power. The magazine's status as an air power friend stems from more than just Courtney's work, however, for the cause seems to have been shared by the magazine as a whole. *Collier's* supported the Army and the Navy and frequently ran articles sympathetic to their needs. In general the magazine was decidedly pro-military and advocated strong national defense across the board, but the Air Force always seemed to be the "apple of its eye." Air power articles clearly and consistently outnumbered articles on the other services, and air policy was rarely questioned, except to say that the Air Force did not have enough planes or was being suppressed in some way. The issue marking the 45th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first flight was almost entirely given over to celebrating the advancement of aviation, and air power figured prominently in the commemoration. *Collier's* even expanded its pro-aviation and air power stance in the fifties to include the full commercial and military exploitation of space.⁵⁰

The *Reader's Digest* was another major outlet for works by air power advocates. Bearing the distinctive stamp of its founder Roy DeWitt Wallace, the *Reader's Digest* was staunchly pro-military and anti-communist throughout the period, but like *Collier's*, its air power articles far exceeded its Army or Navy articles. This may be in part a result of the fact that aviation and military affairs constituted two of the 25 main categories Wallace stressed upon his editors in selecting articles for the magazine. Thus military aviation, which combined both categories, may have had a special place in Wallace's heart. Whatever the reason, after World War II the *Reader's Digest* dedicated itself to advancing strategic air power. In 1948, for example, senior editor Paul Palmer wrote to Spaatz, "We

are going to pursue vigorously our campaign urging the supreme strategic Air Force for our country.”⁵¹ Not only did *Reader's Digest* run frequent reprints of air power articles from other magazines, it also commissioned several original articles from such authors as Huie, Beirne Lay, Jr., and de Seversky. In fact, it serialized nearly every chapter of *Air Power: Key to Survival* in the years before the book was published. Many of *Reader's Digest*'s original air power articles came from its aviation editor and roving military commentator Francis Vivian Drake, and this may be either a cause or an effect of the magazine's enduring interest in air power topics.⁵² Drake joined the magazine in 1943. Before that he had been a World War I fighter pilot in the R.A.F. and a civilian consultant for the Air Force during and after World War II.⁵³ Drake contributed articles throughout the period on numerous military and naval topics, but most of his work stressed a large modern Air Force and strong strategic forces.

Just as many of the nation's leading general interest magazines gave the popular culture crusade a tremendous boost by opening their pages to air power enthusiasts, some of Hollywood's most popular movie studios, producers, and directors immeasurably aided the cause through film. While air power had a long history of providing just the kind of drama, romance, and excitement for which Hollywood was always looking, in several cases one suspects there was more motivation than just “good box office appeal.” First, many postwar air power movies display a unique feature lacking in films from before the war. When John Monk Saunders or Howard Hughes wanted to extoll air power on film before World War II they made movies like *Wings* and *Hell's Angels*, which showed little

more than romantic and dashing pilot characatures and lots of flying footage. During the war, though, films such as *Air Force* and *Winged Victory* were specifically crafted to send a message that went far beyond the earlier romantic stereotypes of aviation films. Now air power advocates wanted films that conveyed the revolutionary potential of air power, films that would convince people air power had rewritten the book on traditional forms of warfare and that the state of America's Air Force was vital to the fate of the nation.

Secondly, in several cases Hollywood figures were willing partners in the popular culture crusade. Two major studios provide excellent examples. In 1945 two executives at Twentieth Century-Fox, Joseph M. Schenk, president, and Darryl F. Zanuck, vice president in charge of production, became charter members of the Air Power League, and the studio made a corporate donation to the League's Foundation.⁵⁴ Shortly thereafter, in 1947, after briefly considering William Wister Haines' novel and play *Command Decision*, the studio settled on *Twelve O'clock High* and Zanuck, who had produced the World War II paean *Winged Victory*, produced the hit movie.⁵⁵ The other studio, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer provides a similar story. Samuel Goldwyn, Louis B. Mayer, E.J. Mannix, vice president and general manager, along with one of their leading stars, Clark Gable, were all charter members of the Air Power League. Gable, who had served as a B-17 crewmember in the Eighth Air Force during the war, also served on the League's Board of Directors and on the Board of Governors of its successor, the National Air Council.⁵⁶ The studio produced *Command Decision*, starring Clark Gable, in 1948, and followed it in 1952 with *Above and Beyond*, a movie about Paul Tibbets' role in the Hiroshima bombing.

There were other, more informal ties between Hollywood and air power advocates. Many ties predate the war, when flying was “all the rage” among Hollywood personalities, and from the Thirties when March Field in Riverside County outside Los Angeles, was commanded by then Major H.H. Arnold and was a popular filming location. Arnold had long realized what the film industry might do for air power. He had appeared in two movies in 1911 as a stunt flier, and he did much to court a favorable relationship, especially with such figures as Mayer, Zanuck, and Jack Warner.⁵⁷ Warner had served briefly with the AAF during World War II, heading its First Motion Picture Unit which would later produce the documentary *The Memphis Belle*, and Warner and Arnold had together come up with the basic idea that became Warner Brothers’ *Air Force*.⁵⁸ After the war Warner served on the board of directors of the Air Force Association.⁵⁹ His interest in air power endured, for in 1955 Warner wrote to Curtis LeMay stating that his studio had hired Beirne Lay to write an Air Force movie for them and asking LeMay to help his studio “help national defense in general, and the air force [sic] in particular.”⁶⁰ The movie came out in 1957 as Warner Brothers’ *Bombers B-52*.

One did not have to be a studio executive, though, to exert effective pressure for the air power cause. Two popular and successful screenwriters and producers, Beirne Lay, Jr. and Sy Bartlett were dedicated air power advocates and were, between the two of them, key figures in bringing before the public five of the films most successful at conveying the air power message: *Twelve O’clock High*, *Above and Beyond*, *Strategic Air Command*, *Bombers B-52*, and *A Gathering of Eagles*.

The films that conveyed the air power advocates' message to the public cannot be entirely attributed to high-placed air power advocates within the film industry, for such a claim would be tenuous at best. Studio executives were still in the business of making money and they had to, and did, consider such factors as whether a story would draw enough paying customers to make a profit. In this light it is significant that each movie in the SAC trilogy was made by a different studio. In fact, no studio earned the reputation of the Air Force's film company. Still, air power advocates were highly successful at getting their message before the public, and for its part as the willing conduit the film industry played a significant role in the popular culture crusade. When one considers Hollywood's skill at making films that would draw large crowds coupled with the new style of postwar air power film, the "message movie," the union of air power advocates and the film industry may have been the most effective part of the popular culture campaign when it came to influencing the average American's views toward air power.

The combination of individual air power advocates and advocacy groups and the groups they worked through to reach the American public with their message was a potent team. While it is impossible to say with certainty how many people air power advocates reached with their message, it is quite conceivable that they reached every man, woman, and child, which was a major part of their goal. Whether they succeeded in convincing the majority of Americans to espouse the faith of air power is quite another matter. Obviously they did not convince everyone, for it was an impossible task. But when the advocates failed to convert someone, it was not for lack of trying or for want of skill in shaping their

message. With the power of award winning plays, novels, movies, and comic strips they put forward some very appealing images; with the barrage of articles launched through nearly every one of the nation's most popular magazines advanced a string of powerful arguments. Altogether it was a very persuasive package that sought to reshape America's world view. For awhile they enjoyed great success in changing views on many issues. It is to those issues and to that success we now turn in our study.

1. Carl Spaatz speeches, 30 July, 2 August, and 3 August 1947, AFPA, microfilm reel 1618, frames 1057-64, AFHRA.
2. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, "The Truth About Our Air Power," *The Saturday Evening Post* (17 February 1951): 20-21, 100-04.
3. 27 February 1953 Telex message Barry Faris, Editor-in-Chief, INS to LeMay, Box A-3, Godfrey folder, LeMay Papers, LOC.
4. Air Power League, *Report to Members*, 8, 11; American Legion, *Keep America Strong in the Air*, 8; LeMay received numerous requests to provide material; see for example, 17 April 1947 letter, Jerome F. Page to LeMay, 29 May 1947 letter, Matthew F. van Istendal, Jr. to LeMay, and 5 June 1947 letter, Phil C. Doyle (Kiwanis Club of Rocky River, Ohio) to LeMay, all in LeMay Papers, catalog number 168.64-47, part 2, AFHRA.
5. Suid, *Guts and Glory*, xxi, 10, 85-87, 116-17; for Air Force objections to script and pressure for changes see 17 November 1948 letter AFPA to Twentieth Century-Fox, Record Group 330, Entry 140, Box 677, Twelve O'clock High folder, National Archives, and 22 May 1953 letter Lt. Col. Reade Tilley to Beirne Lay, Jr., and 20 July 1953 letter Col. Paul K. Carlton to Lt. Col. Tilley, both in LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Lay folder, LOC, relating to *Strategic Air Command*. Suid also gives a good overview of how other branches of the service used the "carrot" of official assistance to make themselves look good in the movies.
6. See letters 1 February 1956 Donald E. Baruch, Chief, Motion Pictures Section, Office of Public Information, to Frank McCarthy, Director of Public Relations, Twentieth Century-Fox, and 2 February 1956 Frank McCarthy to Donald Baruch, Record Group 330, Entry 1006, Box 26, The Hunters folder, and Memo for Record 9 August [1949?] D. E. Baruch, with attached draft letter Vandenberg to Jack Warner, Record Group 330, Entry 140, Box 697, Air Cadets folder, all in National Archives.
7. See 14 December, 22 December 1952, 16 March, 1 May 1953 letters Lay to LeMay, LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Lay folder, LOC.
8. Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 167-70.
9. See, for example, the package sent out for Air Force Day, 1 August 1946 in AFPA, microfilm reel 1619, frames 0904-47, AFHRA.
10. Army Talk #666, "Guide For Discussion Leaders," 20 June 1947, AFPA, microfilm reel 1618, frames 1002-20, AFHRA.
11. See for example, 2 May 1949, 7 March 1950, 16 March and 3 December 1953, 15 July 1955 letters Lay to LeMay, and 24 May 1949 letter Steve Leo to Lay, all in LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Lay folder, LOC.

12. William Bradford Huie, *Case Against the Admirals*, 21-23; William Bradford Huie, "How the Next War Will Be Fought," *The American Mercury* (April 1946): 433-34.
13. Noel Francis Parrish, "Behind the Sheltering Bomb: Military Indecision From Alamogordo to Korea" (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 1968), 217-18. Parrish was in a position to speak on this with authority, for he was Vandenberg's special assistant during this period; see Walton S. Moody, *Building A Strategic Air Force* (Washington, D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996), 458.
14. James H. Straubel, *Crusade for Airpower: The Story of the Air Force Association* (Washington, D.C.: Aerospace Education Foundation, 1982), 30-35; this is the most significant work on the history of the Air Force Association, and its author served for 33 years with the Association, first as editor of its journal *Air Force*, starting in 1947, then for 30 as Executive Director of the Association; Straubel also edited *Air Force* during the war years under the auspices of the AAF; he wrote this book after retiring from that position in 1980; see 39-40, and foreword, written by James H. Doolittle, 9-12.
15. Ibid, 28-29, 36.
16. Ibid, 37, 50-52, 79-80, 97; Vandenberg speech, Air Force Association Air Force Day Luncheon, New York, 1 August 1947, AFHRA, microfilm reel A-1618, frames 1123-38; Air Force press release on Air Force Day, 18 September 1948, AFHRA, microfilm reel A-1656, frame 0539; Air Force Association, *Airpower Preparedness Symposium - Detroit, Mich., 1952* (Washington, D.C.: Air Force Association, 1952); Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 261-62; Molyneaux, *James Stewart*, 121.
17. Straubel, *Crusade for Airpower*, 55, 66-67, 82-83, 97, 106-07, 113, 186.
18. Ibid, 68-69, 97, 180, 186.
19. Ibid, 55, 67, 83, 97, 107, 113, 186, 284.
20. Ibid, 81, 102-03, 107, 146, 186.
21. Air Power League, *Report to Members*, inside front cover, 1.
22. Ibid, 2, 3, 10.
23. Ibid, 13, 14-18. David Mets mentions the League briefly, noting that Arnold and Spaatz knew of the League's early organizational efforts and worked behind the scenes in 1944 to find a suitable AAF officer, nearing retirement, who could help the committee with their work, but Mets mistakenly asserts that the group was a precursor to the Air Force Association; two clear indications that this is not the case is that the Air Power League continued its activities as both the League and the Council well after the AFA was founded, and one of the AFA's first corporate decisions was that they would not attempt

to duplicate the efforts of the Air Power League, see Mets, *Master of Airpower*, 292-93, and Straubel, *Crusade for Airpower*, 33.

24. Air Power League, *Report to Members*, 2-4.

25. Ibid, 1-2. The League consulted Arnold about the name change, and while he shared the group's concern that the name Air Force League might imply official connection with the AAF and felt strongly that the group should avoid any subservient position with either the Army or the Navy, he felt that Air Force League would best convey to the public the League's goals and objectives. See AAF memo, 27 January 1945, Arnold Papers, frame 511, reel 28135, AFHRA. The fact that the League's leaders felt that "air power" more accurately expressed their broad-based concerns is a further indication that during this period the term air power meant much more than just military aviation.

26. Air Power League, *Report to Members*, 2, 8, 11.

27. Ibid, 11. The Charles E. Wilson who headed the Air Power League should not be confused with the Charles E. Wilson who ran General Motors during the same period and later became Secretary of Defense under Eisenhower. People distinguished between the two by referring to the former as "Electric" Charlie and the latter as "Engine" Charlie.

28. Air Power League, *Peace Through Air Power* (New York: n.p., 1946), 2, 4, 12-23.

29. National Air Council, *The National Air Review* (January 1950): list of officers, Executive Board of Managers, and Board of Governors appears on the inside back cover of this and each succeeding issue; Charles E. Wilson, "The National Air Council: Its Aims, Structure, and Activities," *The National Air Review* (February 1950): 1-4. For the President's Air Policy Commission, also known as the Finletter Commission, see Thomas K. Finletter, *Survival in the Air Age: A Report by the President's Air Policy Commission* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1948) and Moody, *Building A Strategic Air Force*, 161-66; Finletter served briefly on the Council's Executive Board of Managers; he became Secretary of the Air Force in April 1950 and does not appear on the list of Council executives after that date.

30. Wilson, "National Air Council," 3.

31. Two such lectures, John C. Cooper, "The Fundamentals of Air Power," delivered on 7 January 1948, and J. Carlton Ward, Jr., "The Economic Consequences of Air Power," given on 7 March 1949, give evidence that there were at least four in the series.

32. Air Power League, *Report to Members*, 4.

33. Ibid, 3.

34. The Civil Air Patrol began during the early years of World War II before America's entry. Originally intended to enlist America's civilian pilots in efforts to boost air defenses, by the end of the war the CAP was participating in anti-submarine warfare off America's coasts and patrolling for enemy aircraft. After the war it dropped its air defense mission and assumed its current missions of aiding in disaster relief efforts and searching for downed aircraft and people lost or injured in inaccessible areas. For a useful study of the CAP see Frank A. Burnham, *Hero Next Door* (Fallbrook, Calif.: Aero Publishers, 1974).

35. 19 July and 26 July 1949 letters to H.H. Arnold, Eaker Papers, Box I: 29, LOC.

36. Two studies on the American Legion are Raymond Moley, Jr., *The American Legion Story* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1966), and Thomas A. Rumer, *The American Legion: An Official History, 1919-1989* (New York: M. Evans and Co., 1990); while dated, Roscoe Baker, *The American Legion and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1954) is a study of how the Legion's organization and methods help bring pressure to bear in achieving its goals; thus it examines the topic of our study during the period of our study; see 20-25 for contemporary assessment of League's effectiveness.

37. Moley, *Legion Story*, 162-65, 231-32, 238-39; Rumer, *American Legion*, 180-81.

38. American Legion, *What is Happening to Our Air Power?* (Indianapolis: American Legion, 1947), motto on inside front cover and back cover, and quote from 2; American Legion, *Keep America Strong in the Air* (Indianapolis: American Legion, 1947), cover, inside cover, and every even numbered page throughout; American Legion, *The Fifties: Decade of Air Decision* (Indianapolis: American Legion, 1949), unpaginated; American Legion, *Air Power in an Age of Peril* (Indianapolis: American Legion, 1954), unpaginated.

39. Rumer, *American Legion*, 590-91; Air Power League, *Report to Members*, inside front cover, 17; National Air Council, *National Air Review* (January 1950): inside back cover; Rickenbacker's name appears on the list of Council Executives in each issue.

40. Legion, *What is Happening*, 7; while the Navy did not organize its air units into groups, the actual equivalent figure for recommended combined Air Force and Navy strength would have been much higher, see Finletter, *Survival*, 24-28.

41. Legion, *Keep America Strong in the Air*, cover.

42. Ibid, 8, 15-17.

43. Ibid, 8-10.

44. Ibid, 19-44.

45. Marshall Andrews, *Disaster Through Air Power* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1950), x, 7.

46. Air Power League, *Report to the Members*, inside front cover, 6, 14-18; National Air Council, *The National Air Review*, inside back cover of each issue.
47. Undated memo from Felix Jager, attached to advanced copy of Alexander P. de Seversky, "We're Preparing for the Wrong War," *Look* (9 December 1947), located in catalog number 168.7006-16, AFHRA.
48. Letter Arnold to Eaker, 23 July 1949, and Eaker to Arnold, 26 July 1949, box I:29, Arnold folder, Eaker Papers, LOC.
49. Benjamin D. Foulois, with C.V. Glines, *From the Wright Brothers to the Astronauts: The Memoirs of Major General Benjamin D. Foulois* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), 82-83; Frederick R. Neely, "The Collier Trophy," *Collier's* (25 December 1948): 30-31.
50. *Collier's* (25 December 1948); for early space advocacy, see for example, 11 April 1953 editorial, page 70, and three part space travel series by Cornelius Ryan, "Man's Survival in Space," *Collier's* (28 February 1953); "Testing the Men," (7 March 1953); and "Emergency!" (14 March 1953).
51. John Heidenry, *Theirs Was the Kingdom: Lila and DeWitt Wallace and the Story of the Reader's Digest* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 209-10; James Playsted Wood, *Of Lasting Interest: The Story of the Reader's Digest* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1967), 104-06; Jeffrey G. Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945-1950* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1994), 199.
52. Heidenry, *Theirs Was the Kingdom*, 135.
53. Francis Vivian Drake, "A Realistic Plan for National Survival," *Reader's Digest* (February 1958): 43.
54. Air Power League, *Report to Members*, 6, 18.
55. Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 82-84; Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 215-16.
56. Air Power League, *Report to Members*, 15-16; National Air Council, *The National Air Review* (January 1950): inside back cover.
57. Paris, *From Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 22; Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 8, 102.
58. Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 180, 186.
59. Air Force Association, *Air Force* (October 1946): 4.
60. 21 March 1955 letter Warner to LeMay, LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Lay folder, LOC.

CHAPTER 5

THE AIR POWER REVOLUTION: EARLY POSTWAR YEARS

The air campaigns of World War II did more than anything else since the dawn of flight to bolster the air power cause and to strengthen the faith of air power advocates. First, the bombing efforts were massive undertakings, and too often size alone is enough to convince many people that something significant and effective is being accomplished.¹ More important, though, the campaigns were a central part of Allied strategy for defeating both Germany and Japan.² The results, while hardly conclusive, were significant enough to reinforce the belief of interwar air power advocates that they had been correct in their predictions of an air power revolution. The results also impressed many other observers who were in positions to help shape public opinion. They had heard the prophecies of revolution and they came to believe that Billy Mitchell and the Boys had been right all along. Thus the air power revolution mushroomed after the war as new converts flocked to the banner adding their voices to the old campaigners who had been preaching the air power gospel since the interwar period. More important, the American public was much more receptive to the air power advocates' claims thanks to the widespread public support for air power generated by the war, and the power of wartime images that extolled the effectiveness of America's air campaigns. Filled with revolutionary zeal, many air power

advocates yearned to share their new-found faith with the American public, for they were convinced that only through mass conversion, through making America an “air power nation,” could air power truly achieve the potential they envisioned. This evangelistic conviction was the driving force behind the air power advocates’ popular culture crusade.

The revolutionary mentality, though, went beyond the mere goal of converting the masses to the cause of air power. It also spawned a revolutionary world view that sought to reshape attitudes and reinterpret past events. Air power advocates believed that air power, in its broadest sense of all activities related to aviation, called for a new way of looking at the world, both literally and figuratively. Thus in these early postwar years the popular culture campaign focused not only on advocating larger military air forces, in a larger sense it sought to “reeducate” the American people in the new “world view” that went along with the postwar conception of air power. The early years of this postwar air power crusade were frequently characterized by a simplicity, often a naiveté, in the air power advocates’ claims. The Soviet Union did not emerge immediately as a widely perceived threat, and thus for several years advocates presented air power as an all-purpose answer to any threat that might arise. Moreover, technological change, specifically missiles and nuclear weapons, was in such a state of flux that no one could say with any certainty what would be the future nature of warfare.

But these early postwar years also found the air power advocates free of the bureaucratic responsibilities and allegiances that would shape much of the popular culture message in later periods. The AAF was still part of the Army, and thus air power advocates could make wild claims for air power without being held totally responsible for

delivering on their promises. Even after the Air Force gained independence in 1947, air power advocates could claim that parsimonious defense budgets kept the Air Force from realizing its true potential. Furthermore, the Strategic Air Command, which became the focus of much of the popular culture campaign in the fifties, did not immediately emerge as an institutional force to drive the nature of air power advocates' agitation. For all these reasons the claims made for air power were often highly idealistic, and at times unrealistic, in the early years following the war.

In outlining the early years of the popular culture campaign, this chapter will focus on various aspects of the air power advocates' revolutionary world view as a means of illustrating the image of air power they put before the American public. Some of the topics that made up this revolutionary world view include the polar concept, the new nature of warfare, and how air power "won" World War II. By focusing on the issues stressed by air power advocates in their public works, one learns not only what they said about air power and how they said it, but more important, what concepts lay behind the popular culture crusade and what they expected the public to believe about air power.

ITS A WHOLE NEW WORLD: THE POLAR CONCEPT

One of the most intriguing themes of the popular culture campaign was the air power advocates' notion that people needed to look at the planet in a whole new way. Aviation enthusiasts had long stressed the belief that the airplane had radically redefined humanity's conception of time and space. This had been a phenomenon of other transportation revolutions, but aviation enthusiasts brought a new dimension, the third

dimension, to their claims.³ The airplane, according to its proponents, eliminated all natural and man-made boundaries because in the air mountains, rivers, and borders were meaningless.⁴ Interwar air power advocates applied much the same reasoning when they claimed that the warplane had negated America's traditional oceanic isolation.⁵ During World War II, though, a new idea arose that the airplane had also conquered the polar ice cap, thus bringing about a new geographical conception of the northern hemisphere. This new reality, some argued, necessitated a new standard depiction of the world, called a polar projection, which viewed the world with the north pole at its center.

To understand why postwar air power advocates and others found this new image so revolutionary one needs to understand that how we depict the world helps shape our image of geographic reality. The standard depiction of the earth on a flat map uses the Mercator projection. This depiction indicates that the direction of travel from Chicago to Moscow is east, over New Brunswick and England. From a polar perspective, however, the shortest distance is north over the Arctic. As simple as this reorientation sounds, writers of the time treated it as a revolutionary concept. In numerous works throughout the late forties authors describe this concept to their readers as if they had just unlocked one of the hidden secrets of the universe. The writers of a 1944 high school geography text, for example, devote the first three sections to the new idea and its implications. Their revolutionary attitude is best captured by the book's frontispiece, which depicts a youth enlightening an older man with a map drawn from a polar perspective, and by one of the book's review question which asks, "Why has the 'dreaded' Arctic come to be called the 'friendly' Arctic?"⁶ William Bradford Huie stated in 1946 that the Mercator projection

had arisen in the days when sea routes dominated international trade and travel, but claimed that the needs of the air age dictated a new appreciation of the earth's surface. Postwar air power advocates saw great economic consequences for international trade and air travel arising from exploitation of this concept. W.B. Courtney for example, warned in a 1947 *Collier's* article that America lagged behind Britain and the Soviet Union in the development of commercial air transportation and air liners able to take advantage of opportunities presented by the polar concept, and urged immediate action to avoid being locked out of the future trans-polar trade routes.⁷

Air power advocates seized upon the polar concept and made it a part of their message that air power brought a new threat from a previously unimagined direction, a threat that only air power could meet. In a December 1945 *Collier's* article Spaatz stated that intercontinental atomic war was already a reality, because, by flying over the arctic, a B-29 could reach any potential adversary in the northern hemisphere, "where, curiously enough, all of the great powers lie." The article includes a polar projection map of the northern hemisphere that shows the distance from Chicago to such countries as Japan, China, India, and Britain.⁸ Ira Eaker expanded upon this point in a 1946 speech on the Army-sponsored radio program *So Proudly We Hail*:

All the prime industrial powers of the world are located *above* the 30 degree, north latitude line.... Every great industrial center can be hit by a plane with the B-29's range, flying from a base near the Arctic Circle. An enemy plane could make a one-way crossing of the polar area, the shortest air route, and strike any of our key manufacturing zones.⁹

The Air Power League stressed these same sentiments in both February and September of 1946,¹⁰ but Alexander de Seversky gave the concept its fullest delineation. In a 1947

article for *Look* magazine he describes the Arctic region as a World War I style no-man's land with long-range air power launched by the Soviets and Americans flying overhead. The article even includes a half-page graphic illustration to reinforce the point. When de Seversky incorporated this article into his 1950 book *Air Power: Key to Survival*, he expanded the point to include its commercial implications, which he felt dictated America's economic domination of South America, but by this time many were familiar with the polar concept.¹¹

The military implications of the polar concept quickly caught on in America's popular media, but its wider cultural image did not. Writers who were not necessarily connected to the air power cause soon joined the air power advocates in warning of the air threat from the north. In 1946, for example, William Veazie Pratt, a retired admiral, former Navy CNO, and a *Newsweek* correspondent long noted for his cooperative attitude toward the Army and the AAF, used the polar concept as his main argument for Air Force independence. In his regular *Newsweek* column Pratt stated that the arctic region would become a main theater for any future conflict, and because of its inhospitable climate, only land-based air would be able to operate effectively in that region.¹² Similarly, John Kord Lagemann, in a 1946 *Collier's* article, stated that unlike the last two thousand years where civilization centered around the Mediterranean, for the next two thousand years civilization would center around the Arctic Ocean. He claimed that the region above the 30th parallel contained 98% of the world industry and 90% of the world's population. He warned, though, that this entire region was within striking range of B-29-type bombers

based in the arctic region. Under these circumstances, he claimed, “*the power which controls the arctic airspace controls the world.*”¹³

It is interesting to note that Spaatz’s and Pratt’s articles, Eaker’s speech, and the two Air Power League pamphlets mention no specific enemy. The threat could come from any nation on the Eurasian land mass north of the 30 degree north latitude. By 1947, when de Seversky first wrote of the polar concept, tensions with the Soviets had escalated to the point that he mentions them as the West’s only adversary. Finally, by February 1950 the concept of a holocaust coming at America from over the North Pole had become so firmly entrenched that a *Life* magazine article discussing the threat of aerial attack includes a depiction of a proposed series of interlocking radar stations protecting North America.¹⁴ By 1950, then, the concept had been reduced to a grim reality of the Cold War but the larger vision of a new world view fell by the wayside. Americans still envisioned the world as a Mercator projection, but it readily accepted the fact that any attack from the Soviet Union would come over the arctic region. Thus popular imagination throughout the Cold War envisioned the arctic as a battlefield dominated by NORAD and the DEW Line, even if the larger geopolitical struggle was one of East versus West with Western Civilization centered around the North Atlantic.

Along with the physical new world view came the belief that average Americans had to become “airminded,” that is, they had to develop a thorough understanding of all aspects relating to aviation and air power. One aspect of this called for a fundamental rethinking of America’s education process. In the interwar period aviation enthusiasts had called for recasting education for all grades up through high school to prepare youth for

life in the Air Age by making them airminded. The crux of the issue called for syllabi to include aviation and aeronautics at all levels and in all subjects.¹⁵ The geography textbook cited above is one product of this effort. After the war air power advocates picked up the refrain and claimed it was necessary for the long-term security of the nation. In 1945 *The Bulletin of the Air Power League* included a picture of an airminded boy holding a model of an airplane and the text states, “He is an example of the public airmindedness which must be maintained if the United States is to preserve supremacy in the air.” A year later the League listed as one of suggested activities of Air Power Clubs “foster[ing] in primary and secondary schools the establishment of standardized courses in subjects related to aviation.”¹⁶ In 1949 a team of *Collier’s* editors visited a University of Oklahoma kindergarten where Link trainers had been installed to “air-condition” the students. The editors pronounced themselves pleased, especially with the fact that the trainers were also surrounded by toys to combine fun with the effort to “train the kids for a grim time ahead.” In 1951, after the Air Power League had become the National Air Council, it set up an education program to encourage aviation education in primary and secondary schools, an effort that gained strong Air Force support.¹⁷

The effort to encourage airmindedness also extended to the general public as well. In 1945 Arnold stated in the *New York Times Magazine* that “an air-minded public is the broad base of American air power.” A few months later in *The National Geographic Magazine* he added, “Since air power depends for its existence upon...the air-mindedness of the Nation, the Air Forces must promote the development of American civil air power in all of its forms, both commercial and private.”¹⁸ In its program to advance air power

the American Legion also sought to foster public airmindedness, for as it stated in 1947, “We must learn quickly that Air Power has uprooted our traditional ways of life.” One early indication of the wide-spread concern for airmindedness in connection with air power issues is a September 1945 advertisement for North American Aviation in *Collier’s* magazine. The ad asks, “How do you rate in the AIR-Q test?” It then asks four questions relating to air power and tells the reader, “If you can answer at least three of the four questions on this page correctly, give yourself an ‘A’ in Aviation.”¹⁹

This concern for how Americans imagined the orientation of the globe and their level of airmindedness is more than just an interesting facet of popular culture campaign for air power. It offers a revealing insight into the mindset of air power advocates and their all-encompassing view of the place of air power in the postwar world. Moreover, it is a reflection of their conviction that air power had revolutionized more than just warfare. In their own minds this “new world view” strengthened their conviction that they had divined the true shape of modern warfare, for if they could perceive these lesser “truths” about the impact of aviation on the modern world that were unknown to “ordinary” men and women, their military prophecies must be equally perceptive. One suspects that among some members of their audience their revelations about the “new world order” had the same effect.

RECASTING AIR FORCE INDEPENDENCE: THE UNIFICATION ISSUE

Nothing had been more divisive in the interwar period than air power advocates’ claims that the Air Corps needed independence for air power to achieve its potential.²⁰

For all the public agitation before the war, it is somewhat surprising that after the war Air Force independence was not a major part of the popular culture crusade.²¹ A significant change took place in that the independence question was subsumed into the larger issue of military unification, but even this issue, as far as agitation in popular culture is concerned, was not one that air power advocates heavily stressed.²² Air power advocates often mentioned military unification, and nearly as often the speaker or writer added that three coordinate services of land, sea, and air forces must be part of any unified military structure, but with few exceptions they raised the topic in the midst of some larger issue or as part of a “laundry list” of issues they supported.

The call for military unification began almost as soon as the war ended. Arnold set the tone in November 1945 when he called for a single department of national defense with an independent and coordinate Air Force, and most other air power advocates followed suit.²³ That same month Beirne Lay stated in a *Reader's Digest* article devoted entirely to the subject of military unification that despite the recent victory over the Axis unification was needed because “*we won our war in spite of fundamentally unsound military organization at the top.*” Like most air power advocates Lay supported the Army’s plan for unification, which called for a single department with land, sea and air forces under one commander, for Lay felt that the coordination system used by the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the war had been the root of the problem during the war and would continue to prove inadequate. Lay even tried to forestall the charge that he supported unification as a ploy to gain Air Force independence by claiming that he did not care where air power stood in such a structure so long as national defense was unified. Given

Lay's past and subsequent role in advancing the air power cause, though, and the fact that nearly all air power advocates linked the two issues as Lay did, this claim seems less than genuine.²⁴ The Air Power League officially endorsed unification and published two pamphlets giving the reader a wealth of information on why a single department of defense with a single chief of staff was good for the nation. In each case, though, buried within their pages, the pamphlets also pointed out that unification would bring Air Force independence.²⁵

Air power advocates' support for unification frequently led to attacks on the Navy, which opposed unification, and started a long pattern of postwar conflict between the two that culminated in the "Revolt of the Admirals" in 1949. Lay, for example, stated that the Navy and its secretary, James Forrestal, were using delaying tactics in the public debate hoping that the public would forget about the issue. And Charles E. Wilson, head of the Air Power League, claimed that when the group passed a resolution supporting unification the Navy officially withdrew its recognition of the group.²⁶ William Bradford Huie, though, was one of the most outspoken figures in this aspect of the debate. Huie had come to espouse the air power cause early in World War II and in 1942 wrote a book on the Air Corps' interwar battles with the Army and Navy. After the war, in which he served as a Navy officer, Huie became a leading figure in the popular culture campaign for air power, and three main themes he continually emphasized were air power's capabilities, the need for unification to eliminate duplication, and the Navy's resistance to unification. In 1946 Huie published *The Case Against the Admirals*, a bitter attack against the Navy filled with intemperate charges against Navy leaders. He argued that even in the face of

the enemy the Navy placed its own best interests ahead of the nation, other services, and the lives of American servicemen. Huie felt that much of the Navy's force structure duplicated Army and AAF missions, and that the Navy opposed unification to protect both this duplication and its own freedom of action. There is little doubt that advancing the air power cause lay behind much of this attack because Huie also repeatedly charged that the Navy sabotaged the AAF throughout the interwar, wartime, and postwar periods.²⁷

The air power advocates' espousal of the unification issue was not solely for the benefit of Air Force independence, for many had genuinely supported the Army's single chief of staff idea and saw the National Security Act of 1947 as a flawed compromise.²⁸ Still, the attainment of independence and a large measure of unification ended much of the advocates' statements on the subject. The fight for the twin goals created an atmosphere of animosity between the new Air Force and the Navy, though, and passage of the act did not end all of the attacks launched by the sister-services on each other.

THE REDEMPTION OF BILLY MITCHELL

Part of the drive to reshape people's views toward air power was an attempt to reinterpret past events from the air power advocates' perspective. One such attempt was the redemption of Billy Mitchell. Mitchell had been found guilty of insubordination by a court martial in 1925 and resigned his commission in protest.²⁹ There is little doubt that Mitchell was guilty of the charges against him, as Arnold himself stated in his memoirs in 1949.³⁰ Air power's growth in importance during the war and afterwards, though, led many to believe that Mitchell's vision had justified his actions and air power advocates felt

compelled to rehabilitate his image in the public's eye. Thus a recurring theme in the popular culture campaign was an effort to elevate Mitchell to the status of a far-sighted visionary who was martyred for his efforts to prepare America for the dangers that lay ahead. The spoken message emphasized that events proved that the nation should have listened to him despite his traditionalist critics, but the unspoken message was clear as well: America should also heed postwar air power advocates when they warned about the current need for air power.

The revisionist effort on behalf of Mitchell stretches back to at least the war years. In 1942, for example, de Seversky dedicated both the book and movie versions of *Victory Through Air Power* to Mitchell, and took these opportunities to tell America that a grave injustice had occurred. In the film de Seversky called Mitchell one of history's "men of vision" who foresaw the war but was ignored and vilified. That same year and the next saw the publication of two laudatory biographies of Mitchell, one bearing the leading title *Billy Mitchell, Founder of Our Air Force and Prophet Without Honor*.³¹

After the war, though, redemption efforts hit full stride as numerous air power advocates paid homage to Mitchell. Some of the testimonials made on his behalf were quite subtle. A sample speech distributed to all AAF units in 1946, for example, recalls the memory of fallen airmen from the war and then lists Mitchell as "foremost in our affection" for he "fought against hopeless odds...to have air power recognized as the mighty weapon it is." And in the play, novel, and movie versions of *Command Decision* the hero, Brigadier General Dennis, names his firstborn son after Mitchell.³²

Other reinterpretations of Mitchell's legacy, however, were more direct.

Immediately after the war W.B. Courtney claimed that Mitchell had been the pioneer of "real air-power thinking." Trenchard had been of the same mind, but Douhet had been impractical. More important, though, is that Courtney claimed that the Germans had been Mitchell's closest students during the interwar years and that applying his lessons made their initial victories possible. But because they did not fully trust those lessons, Courtney added, they shackled air power's true potential and were defeated by American air power.³³ In a similar vein the Air Power League credited Mitchell with inventing the concept of vertical envelopment, that is, flying over the enemy forces to strike them in the rear.³⁴ These claims that Mitchell was a pioneer air power theorist are clearly exaggerated, for as Mitchell's biographer states, "he borrowed his ideas largely from the international community of airmen which he joined during World War I."³⁵

Another frequent claim was that Mitchell had foreseen World War II and its basic character, a point Huie, for example, makes repeatedly in his 1946 indictment of the Navy, *The Case Against the Admirals*. Huie even took to affecting Mitchell's colorful language, as in a 1949 *Reader's Digest* article when he referred to Army and Navy leaders who opposed air power as "the Maginot minds, the yearners for Yesterday."³⁶ Arnold himself undertook a comprehensive effort to reform the public memory of Mitchell through his 1949 memoirs. Throughout his chapters on World War I and the interwar period Arnold portrays his friend and mentor as a brash but visionary patriot who sacrificed himself to gain air power for America. At one point Arnold states that he counseled caution but that Mitchell voiced his determination to sacrifice himself to make the Army and Navy listen.

Arnold reports that Mitchell felt he was the only one who was in a position to make a difference, for, as Arnold quoted Mitchell, "I can afford to do it. You can't."³⁷

One measure of the effectiveness of this campaign, and the widespread sympathy for Mitchell and for air power in general, is that in 1946 Congress voted a special medal of honor to be posthumously awarded to Mitchell. This medal is frequently confused with the Congressional Medal of Honor, as, for example, when Huie states that, "Congress acknowledged the national shame and pinned the Congressional Medal of Honor upon Mitchell's ghost."³⁸ The design of the medal and its inscription, though, as well as the wording of the bill authorizing the medal, make clear that it has no connection with the nation's highest military honor.³⁹ Still, this unique recognition of Mitchell by joint act of Congress is a reflection of the widespread sentiment after World War II that America was deeply indebted to Mitchell and needed to make amends for past treatment. The medal was presented to Mitchell's son, William Mitchell, Jr., by Chief of Staff Carl Spaatz on 27 March 1948. Mitchell's family later tried to follow-up on the official sentiments embodied in the medal by having Mitchell's court martial conviction officially overturned. In this they were joined by the Air Force Association, and in 1956 their petition went before Air Force Secretary James Douglas. The petition was turned down, however, in recognition of the fact that while his motives may have been laudable, his insubordinate actions could not be officially sanctioned by any military organization, even the Air Force.⁴⁰

Perhaps the public culmination of the attempt to redeem Mitchell, though, was the 1955 movie *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell*. While the movie lays outside the time span of this chapter, its roots go back to World War II and much of its spirit relates to the

period under consideration. Little more than two weeks after Pearl Harbor was attacked, Jack Warner wrote to Arnold stating that his studio had earlier bought the rights to make a film based on Mitchell's life, but that with the nation now locked in war he felt that it was best not to open old interservice wounds. He asked Arnold for his "off the record" advice on the matter. Arnold wrote back on New Year's Eve and whole-heartedly agreed with Warner's reservations stating that it would be best for the nation to wait on the project. "Later," Arnold added, "when the situation is a little less acute, the picture...may be of real assistance from the moral standpoint." A week later Warner wrote back to inform Arnold that he would wait until some future date to make the movie.⁴¹

The studio waited until 1955 to make the movie, and thus it reflects elements of mid-fifties Cold War concerns, but its primary emphasis was a belated contribution to the effort to recast public memory of Billy Mitchell with Gary Cooper playing the leading role. From start to finish the film depicts the Army and Navy as obstinately indifferent to the capabilities of air power and Mitchell as the heroic leader of airmen in both services who see what air power can do but who are needlessly dying in their effort to keep American air power alive.⁴² Mitchell's sinking of the *Ostfriesland*, for example, is depicted as a prolonged effort by the Army and Navy to "rig" the test to make it impossible for Mitchell to succeed. Thus he is forced to violate orders to make the test an honest assessment of air power's capabilities. Mitchell's famous press statement that prompted his court-martial is cast in a similar light. With the Army ignoring his repeated efforts to correct dangerous problems through official channels, and with the Navy ignoring similar efforts among its airmen, Mitchell is portrayed as a heroic and selfless patriot who issues his press

statement knowing it will cost him his career. Ignoring the newspapermen's efforts to get him to tone down his inflammatory charges, he replies to one report's question of whether this statement could get him court-martialed by stating "that is exactly what I want." The film further sanitizes Mitchell's reputation by depicting him as eschewing the public appeal his defense team, headed by Congressman Frank Reid, feels is necessary to winning the case. Mitchell, according to the movie, merely wanted to win support for air power, not discredit the Army. In reality, Mitchell arranged for *Liberty* magazine to publish articles around the time of the trial to maximize his publicity.⁴³

In presenting the trial itself, the film used an approach found in other works of air power advocacy, that of portraying supporters of air power as sensible and reasonable while portraying its critics as dull-witted, malicious, or biased by service loyalties. Throughout the first half of the trial, for example, the general who heads the court refuses to allow Mitchell to bring evidence that his remarks were justified because such evidence would damage the Army's reputation. When Mitchell's lawyers finally maneuver the court into allowing this evidence the prosecuting attorney is reduced to a caricature of a pathetic, flustered, and indecisive man overwhelmed by the damage the evidence seems to do to his case. The prosecution's fortunes are only saved by the last-minute arrival of the Army's "best legal mind" who wins by what appears as legal hair-splitting and by mocking Mitchell's predictions of the future of air power. Significantly, every one of the predictions that the prosecutor holds up for ridicule, super-sonic flight, trans-oceanic flight, and airborne operations to name just a few, had all become commonplace by 1955, thus enhancing Mitchell's reputation as a visionary before the film's audience. The

highpoint of this fictional scene is the ridicule heaped upon Mitchell's prediction that the Japanese will launch a war in the Pacific with a carrier-borne air attack on Pearl Harbor.

The redemption of Billy Mitchell was more than just an effort to canonize a man many air power advocates counted as a friend or mentor. Many did believe he deserved honor and the nation's gratitude and saw this movement as doing justice to one who had been wronged. Also the new Air Force and its supporters needed their pantheon of saints and martyrs and Billy Mitchell fit the bill perfectly. But as air power advocates set out to bring about the air power revolution and to win the nation's support for their cause, they buttressed their claims with allusions to past prophecies that they asserted had come true. Redeeming the reputation of Billy Mitchell aided in that cause for if people were convinced to honor past air power prophets they might be more inclined to believe current air power prophecies.

THE NEW NATURE OF WAR: THE HEART OF THE AIR POWER REVOLUTION

The notion of the warplane revolutionizing warfare is an old one. Da Vinci, Franklin, and Tennyson had all speculated on the tremendous advantage they imagined an aerial army would have over traditional forces. Once the airplane was invented this supposed revolution became the centerpiece of pre-World War II air power advocates. It is not surprising, therefore, that after the war air power advocates returned to the notion that warfare had been transformed in the air age. The postwar claims for an air power revolution took on many of the old themes from the interwar period, such as airplanes over-leaping traditional defenses to strike directly at the enemy's heart, but they also

incorporated new themes, particularly themes driven by new technological developments that emerged late in the war. Not all air power advocates argued the same themes, and at times they contradicted one another, but the air power revolution was a central part of the postwar popular culture campaign, and curiously, one that was largely confined to the early postwar period.

The heart of the postwar notion of an air power revolution centered on strategic bombing. Most air power advocates emerged from the war with their faith in strategic bombing as strong or stronger than it had been before the war. As we shall see, this faith extended to an attempt to prove that strategic bombing had won the war, but it also shaped air power advocates' conviction that the main effort of any future war would involve a massive bombing campaign aimed at the enemy's industrial base. Spaatz gave this conviction its fullest expression in a 1946 *Foreign Affairs* article. Spaatz called strategic bombing "the most powerful instrument of war thus far known," because it was:

the first war instrument of history capable of stopping the heart mechanism of a great industrialized enemy. It paralyzes his military power at the core.... it has a capacity...to carry a tremendous striking force...over the traditional line of war (along which the surface forces are locked in battle on land and sea) in order to destroy war industries and arsenals and cities...in fact, the heart and the arteries of war economy - so that the enemy's will to resist is broken through nullification of his means.⁴⁴

While carefully avoiding the claim that strategic bombing won World War II, Spaatz nonetheless claimed that strategic bombing's unique capabilities meant that the next war would likely be determined by air power before surface forces were able to engage the enemy in combat.⁴⁵

Spaatz's *Foreign Affairs* article is especially noteworthy because it is one of the few postwar articles that ignored nuclear weapons and focused exclusively on conventional bombing. Most other works, including most by Spaatz, fitted the atomic bomb squarely into the predictions of strategic bombing's revolutionary capabilities. This is ironic because America's supply of atomic bombs remained so low for so long that for many years any strategic bombing campaign would have, by necessity, relied heavily on conventional bombing.⁴⁶ This was not the picture that air power advocates projected to the public, though, for in their eagerness to portray air power as revolutionary, they routinely linked their cause to other technological wonders that were seen by the public as revolutionary and modern. Early public reaction to the atomic bomb showed a strange mixture of emotions ranging from fear and anxiety to awe and admiration. Despite misgivings, though, nuclear weapons for national defense enjoyed strong public support.⁴⁷ Air power advocates quickly seized upon the range of public emotions toward the atomic bomb to portray air power as at once the shocking face of future warfare and the only means of protecting America from grave danger.

Almost as soon as the war ended air power advocates began making predictions about what the next war would look like, and they consistently claimed that atomic weapons would be an inevitable part of future conflict. The early predictions of the inevitability of nuclear war, though, often emphasized the threat this posed to America, despite the fact that until 1949 America had a monopoly on the atomic bomb. In November 1945, for example, Arnold wrote in the *New York Times Magazine* that any future war would start with a devastating sneak attack involving atomic weapons, and that

the first day of battle would decide the course of the war. Arnold also introduced another aspect of the air power advocates' claim that America could not ignore this new style of warfare. Warning against relying on old comforting notions of isolationism and wide oceans to protect America from foreign conflicts, Arnold stated that America would never again have the luxury of a long period to prepare for war as it had in the two world wars. Instead America would be the first target of any future aggressor and would be bombed without warning to prevent it from mobilizing its latent industrial strength. Spaatz stressed the same point a month later, and added that "unless we stand in split-second readiness we will lose a future war."⁴⁸ Less than a year later, a sample speech distributed by the Air Force Public Relations Office for Air Force Day 1946 pointed to the threat of attack over the North Pole and stated that bombers carrying atomic weapons threatened every American city.⁴⁹ In a 1947 radio address Spaatz was even more specific. Atomic bombs would wipe out American industry: "Chicago and Detroit could be as devastated as Hiroshima."⁵⁰

Missiles, according to air power advocates, made the threat to America even more urgent. The appearance of German V-2 rockets in World War II presented the world with an image that horrified and fascinated the American public, an image that came to be called Push-Button warfare. The missile was such a startling innovation at the end of the war that in a September 1945 article in *Collier's* W.B. Courtney predicted that "in the not too distant future the familiar airplane will be to air power as the Roman chariot is to modern land power." In his November 1945 article Arnold said that Push-Button war was a reality, and that guided missiles would soon be able to achieve "perfect strikes" at great

speed thousands of miles away. A month later Francis Vivian Drake, writing for the *Reader's Digest*, claimed that atomic bombs were already much more powerful than the ones dropped on Japan, and mounting these new bombs on missiles posed a grave threat to America. Such weapons were impossible to stop Drake observed, noting that “*no V-2 was ever intercepted.*”⁵¹

Air power advocates stressed the image of a nuclear threat to America as a means of presenting air power as the only defense against this new threat that was itself based upon attack through the air. Such an approach relied heavily upon the tradition of technological messianism long inherent in the popular fascination with aviation, for air power advocates were setting up an air power bogeyman and then offering air power as the nation’s only hope of salvation. In this effort they became early proponents of nuclear deterrence. After painting the specter of nuclear-tipped missiles devastating American cities, Arnold, in his November 1945 article, stated that the only defense against such an attack was a strong strategic air force in-being poised to retaliate against any nation that launched such an attack.⁵² It is significant to note that this early enunciation of the deterrent role of air power was made before any other nation had acquired nuclear weapons and before the Soviet Union emerged as the main adversary of the West. In laying out this argument Arnold presented a theme that would remain a standard feature of the popular culture crusade throughout its duration, and most air power advocates adhered closely to Arnold’s original lines. The Air Power League in September 1946 stated that armies and navies were in many circumstances ineffective as a deterrent, but that air power was “the best preventive of aggression that exists.” It then drove the point

home visually on its back cover by depicting a mushroom cloud with the caption, “Peace Through Air Power - Or This.” The concept of air power as nuclear deterrence was at the heart of the “Air Power is Peace Power” slogan popular with air power advocates during the late forties. First introduced by Spaatz in a radio address in 1947, the theme was so common it became a virtual symbol, as can be seen by the logo adorning all American Legion air power pamphlets well into the fifties. The concept of nuclear deterrence was perhaps most forcefully stated, among air power advocates at least, by William Bradford Huie in a 1949 *Reader’s Digest* article, which he stated was meant as a warning to the Soviets. After detailing America’s supposed nuclear capabilities Huie boasted: “we can do to Russia, if Russia attacks us, what Rome did to Carthage.”⁵³

The postwar linking of strategic bombing with atomic weapons by air power advocates was part of an old tradition of promising quick and easy victory through air power, in this case, through atomic bombing. Stating that Americans had accepted air power without understanding its revolutionary potential or the new nature of modern warfare, Spaatz, in a 1948 *Life* article, explicitly linked bombing and nuclear weapons to the notion of quick victory through air power in an effort to further the public’s education and to bolster its faith. In one of his first articles written after his retirement, Spaatz reiterated the old notion that air power allowed a nation to by-pass traditional defenses and strike directly at the enemy’s heart. Writing in the midst of escalating tensions with the Soviets, Spaatz claimed that the Soviet Union’s power rested on “a relatively few decisive target areas,” and “that the precision bombing of a few hundred square miles of industrial area in a score of Russian cities would fatally cripple Russian industrial power.”

Spaatz added the element of mathematical precision with his inaugural column in *Newsweek* in September 1948. Spaatz stated that, based on the TNT equivalent of the Hiroshima bomb, ninety nuclear loaded B-29s equaled 79,200 conventionally loaded B-17s, and since B-17s and B-24s proved so effective against Germany in World War II where there were never more than 5,000 at any one time, ninety B-29s with their nuclear loads should have little trouble defeating any aggressor.⁵⁴ Huie had also claimed that nuclear air power could deliver quick victory. Speculating in 1946 on how a future war would be fought he stated that two successive waves of missiles and bombers would leave the third wave of airborne occupation troops little to do in the way of mopping up. He even predicted that the war would be over so quickly that the Navy's submarines would not have enough time to begin effective anti-shipping operations.⁵⁵

The assurances of swift defeat at the hands of air power encouraged an already pronounced trend for the public to view atomic bombs as wonder weapons, and thus fantastic predictions proliferated. In 1948 *U.S. News and World Report* cited the writings of air power advocates in mapping out a "Blueprint for a 30-Day War" in which the U.S. would bring a nation like the Soviet Union to its knees with a swift and furious "air blitz."⁵⁶ Just as the public could be reassured with images of easy victory, though, the heightened expectation of the new lethality of air power could back-fire as well. In November 1945 *Life* magazine cited Arnold's writings as the inspiration for its story "The Thirty-Six Hour War" in which a sudden atomic missile attack from an unnamed adversary brings America to its knees. So powerful was the image of near-instantaneous devastation from nuclear attack that one author, Russell V. Ritchey, envisioned a scenario where the

Soviets had pre-positioned thirty-six atomic bombs around key American cities and then demands immediate surrender. The story ends with the president presenting the ultimatum to his cabinet and asking the question that was the story's title, "What Would You Do?"⁵⁷

Some air power advocates would later back away from predictions of quick and easy victory, and they would later have to contend with heightened public fears when the Soviets developed their own atomic bomb, fears the air power advocates had themselves helped to cultivate. But air power advocates found it harder to erase public images of nuclear victory or defeat than it had been to create those images. The predictions of quick victory, though, point to a fallacy that had long lurked beneath the surface of the notion of an air power revolution. Running at least as far back as Douhet's *Command of the Air*, air power advocates had been promising that air power could quickly defeat any nation, and they had enjoyed considerable success in awakening public expectations for such capability. The title, "The Thirty-Six Hour War," of 1945 is more than coincidentally reminiscent of Stuart Chase's 1929 article "The Two-Hour War."⁵⁸ Both articles are products of the exaggerated claims made for air power in their day. Such promises seemed not only plausible to many, they also seemed to have the ring of necessity, inevitability, even desirability. But such claims were invariably based on hypothetical situations and a caricatured foe who took no defensive action and who compliantly sunk into chaos with no messy details to complicate postwar scenarios. When applied to specific situations such as World War II Germany or the Cold War Soviet Union, frictions of war not only upset the too-neat scenarios upon which the predictions had been based, they also left the air power advocates who made the predictions looking foolish. Too

often such failures left the air power advocates looking around for someone to blame for the failure so as to protect the reputation of the air power cause.

One exception to those who saw nuclear weapons as part of an air power revolution was Alexander de Seversky. In a 1946 *Reader's Digest* article he had argued that the world-wide reaction to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings had grossly exaggerated the effectiveness of atomic bombs. The article brought down a storm of condemnation on de Seversky, and one might have wondered why he was swimming against the tide of even his fellow air power advocates who clearly shared, and helped perpetuate, the popular view of atomic devastation. The mystery became clear when his book *Air Power: Key to Survival* was published in 1950. Essentially de Seversky objected to the notion of quick and easy victory through atomic bombing. He believed air power itself constituted a revolution in warfare, and that air power could, by itself, win the great war against the Soviets which he envisioned. The atomic bomb was just one of the many tools air power would use to win that war. The war he envisioned would begin with a lengthy aerial battle of attrition over the Soviet Union where America's Air Force, if it listened to him and planned ahead, would seize air superiority over the enemy's territory. Seizing air superiority, for de Seversky, constituted air power's true revolutionary capability, because once it was obtained, according to de Seversky, the nation could be subdued by nuclear bombing. He believed, though, that the subjugation effort would take a prolonged bombing campaign involving thousands of atomic bombs to bring victory. This he imagined would be achieved by Americans targeting Soviet industry with nuclear weapons, which would both paralyze the nation's defenses and convince the Soviet

subjects of the impotence of the Communist regime and the benevolence of the Americans because they had not targeted the Russian population. The Russian people would then rise up, throw off their Communist task-masters, and make peace with America.⁵⁹

De Seversky's conception of the air power revolution is not only remarkable because of its fallacious notion that thousands of nuclear weapons could be exploded over enemy territory without its population feeling that it had been targeted, it also returns us to the old dichotomous traditions of Douhet and the ACTS running throughout the wartime and postwar popular culture crusade. To further their revolutionary cause, air power advocates had wedded air power to what was widely seen as a revolutionary weapon in its own right, the atomic bomb. Numerous air power advocates stressed that air power was the only or the best means of delivering nuclear weapons, and they created in popular imagination an image that linked the two inseparably. To many in the public nuclear weapons meant air power, and air power meant nuclear weapons, and both meant revolutionary destructive capability on a scale of which Douhet had never dreamed. At the same time, though, air power advocates perpetuated the mythology of the effectiveness of precision industrial bombing. Even de Seversky stressed the precision industrial bombing image. His thousands of atomic bombs would bring relatively quick victory by bombing vital Russian industries with such precision that the Russian people would not feel they had been targeted: "As precision in picking out and erasing selected strategic targets improves, the toll of life will be reduced. Mass destruction will cease to be mistaken for a strategy." De Seversky backed the point by detailing at length why civilian casualties were counter-productive.⁶⁰

The irony of the postwar image of precision nuclear bombing, besides the fact that atomic destruction was measured in square miles, is that SAC's bombing did not measure up to the public rhetoric. Overall accuracy for 1949 went from 3,700 feet to 2,300, and the winner of that year's bombing and navigation competition for B-36s won with an average score of 1,053 feet.⁶¹ This incongruity did not matter, though, for the popular culture campaign dealt largely in images, and the image of precision and the crippling effect of knocking out enemy industry was interwoven into images of the atomic bomb's revolutionary destructive capability. One wonders if the general public, upon reflection, truly believed de Seversky's claim that atomic bombs could take out factories without killing the cities and civilians surrounding them, but on the popular imagination level the emphasis on precision and industrial targeting helped "sell" postwar American strategic bombing by continuing the image that it was efficient, progressive, and scientific. The images of "pickle barrel" bombing could, in effect, mitigate the images of Hiroshima. One of the chief means of emphasizing the tradition of precision industrial bombing was the effort to establish continuity between wartime precision bombing and postwar nuclear bombing. And to establish precision industrial bombing as a valid part of the air power revolution air power advocates had to reinterpret the World War II strategic bombing campaign to prove that it had won the war just as interwar prophets had said it would.

REWRITING WORLD WAR II: AIR POWER WINS THE WAR

Interwar air power advocates had made great predictions about what air power could accomplish in war, and with massive strategic air campaigns constituting a major

part of Allied strategy in World War II, postwar air power advocates felt considerable compulsion to use the wartime air campaigns to prove that the earlier predictions had been correct. More important, while some mentioned the contributions of other services, far more frequently air power advocates felt constrained to claim that strategic bombing, and thus air power, had won the war, or at least had taken the greatest share of fight out of the enemy. This campaign ran the gamut from speeches, to articles, to books and movies. The wartime bombing campaign, though, was projected in a carefully contrived manner. First, invariably the emphasis focused on the bombing campaign against Germany. This was because of a second characteristic, one that stressed the inherent wisdom of industrial bombing and the precision of American bombing efforts. There were occasional references to the conventional bombing campaign against Japan, but these pale in comparison to the number of references to precision bombing against Germany. Even the atomic bombings got little notice from most air power advocates in the popular culture campaign. There were occasional veiled references that bombing had ended the war without invasion, but even the efforts to establish atomic weapons as part of the air power revolution rarely mention Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Instead, air power advocates presented World War II strategic bombing as a heroic struggle against the enemy in Germany and critics at home, and their depiction was solidly within the tradition of the ACTS. Strategic bombing was efficient, progressive, and scientific.

Claims that bombing had won the war were controversial in official military circles, and thus AAF personnel at times moderated their statements. In the more official venue of *Foreign Affairs*, for example, Spaatz stated that strategic bombing had been decisive in

the overall effort to defeat Germany, but that it could not have won the war alone because time did not permit such an approach. After he had retired, though, and in the more public arena of his *Newsweek* column, Spaatz was less diplomatic. In September 1948 he alluded to the "rubble-heaped industrial plants of Europe" as testimony to strategic bombing's effectiveness, and in March 1949 he stated that by defeating the Luftwaffe bombing had made the invasion of Europe possible.⁶² It is interesting to note how Spaatz implies that destruction equals effectiveness, and in listing the seizure of air superiority as one of strategic bombing's contributions Spaatz neglects the fact that that was not the main contribution predicted for bombing both before and after the war. The Air Force Day 1946 publicity package sent out by the Public Affairs Office was also careful how it stated its claims for wartime bombing. While a sample speech states that strategic bombing was "a decisive factor in winning the war," it also added that air power cooperated with the Army in ground battles and that it "worked with the Navy in patrolling the sea lanes."⁶³

Other air power advocates were less equivocal. In one of the rare references to both theaters, Arnold, in a 1946 radio address stated emphatically that the war was won by getting "bombs on the Messerschmitt plant at Regensburg or the Zero plant outside Tokyo."⁶⁴ W.B. Courtney expanded the point and stated flatly, "Air power caused the war in Europe. Air power won the war in Europe." He went on to explain that air power had given the Germans the confidence to launch their war of conquest but their misuse of air power had cost them the war. Furthermore, he stated that had the Allies devoted more resources to the bombing effort air power could have won the war sooner and with less cost.⁶⁵ In its first publication in August 1945 the Air Power League quoted German Field

Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt that “Allied air power was the decisive factor in Germany’s defeat. It eliminated fuel, destroyed railways, shut off supplies of raw materials from outside Germany, smashed war production centers.”⁶⁶ And in a round-about fashion de Seversky argued that strategic bombing did not win the war because the Army and the Navy would not let the AAF fight the war the way it wanted to, and the way he had recommended. Still, he claimed, despite being relegated to a supporting role for the ground forces, strategic bombing was decisive in Europe.⁶⁷

Such claims were tenuous on the surface because Germany had not surrendered until most of its territory had been occupied and Hitler was dead, and the Navy had a valid argument that it contributed the decisive forces in defeating Japan. Air power advocates tried to prove their case through less obvious evidence, and one of the favorite tactics was to quote from the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey. Conducted in both Europe and Japan after the war, the USSBS was an effort to assess the effectiveness of strategic bombing on the Axis war effort. Teams of civilian and military leaders and specialists pored over records, conducted interviews, and examined target areas and published their findings and conclusions in dozens of volumes and reports. All told, there were enough facts, figures, and statements to support just about any claim.⁶⁸ Spaatz, for example, in his 7 March 1949 *Newsweek* column, quoted the overall assessment of the USSBS: “The German experience suggests that even a first-class military power - rugged and resilient as Germany was - can not live long under full-scale and free exploitation of air weapons over the heart of its territory.”⁶⁹ Two could play at this game, though, and the Navy’s partisans used the USSBS to show that bombing had been a costly waste of lives and resources.

James G. Stahlman, for example, prepared a pamphlet attacking Air Force policies, particularly its attachment to strategic bombing, and circulated it among his “several hundred” friends in the newspaper business. Stahlman, a former Navy reservist, quoted extensively from the USSBS to show that strategic bombing had had little effect on German war production, that tactical bombing was more effective than strategic bombing, and that bombers were vulnerable without escorting fighters.⁷⁰ That both sides could use the USSBS to their own advantage is shown by two articles published by *Reader's Digest* in a “point - counter-point” feature. Arguing for the Navy, Fletcher Pratt quoted the survey to show that German war production in 1944, when the bombing campaign was reaching its peak, actually increased. Francis Vivian Drake countered that Pratt was misreading the USSBS, and he marshaled his own quotes to show that in 1944 strategic bombing cut output of aviation gasoline by 90%, nitrogen by 90%, and steel by 80%.⁷¹

The most effective means of extolling the contribution of strategic bombing in the war, though, came through two works of fiction that were turned into popular movies. *Twelve O'clock High* and *Command Decision* together perhaps did more to establish the image of strategic bombing as a critical part of America's war effort in the public consciousness than all the articles, books, and speeches by all the other air power advocates combined. In the process they were crucial to projecting the tradition of the ACTS and the image of bombing as efficient, modern, and progressive into the postwar air power popular culture campaign.

Twelve O'clock High, while not specifically claiming that strategic bombing alone won the war, did much to put that image into vivid artistic form. The book, written by

Beirne Lay and Sy Bartlett, is quite explicit in claiming the importance of bombing to the war effort. In the opening scene, set after the war, the former adjutant of the 918th Bomb Group visits the old base where the group was stationed in England. As he stands on the overgrown runway a flood of memories overwhelms him and the authors state that his tears, the first since his childhood, were not born of nostalgia, but:

of the clear realization, emerging through the perspective of time, that here on this one station America might have lost the war. That this one rotten apple, decaying at a critically early juncture, almost spoiled the barrel. Americans remembered only victories. Did they know how perilously close the sequence of events at Archbury had come to destroying in its cradle the future giant of air power which, according to its victim, was the decisive factor in Germany's plunge to defeat?⁷²

The problem, and hence the plot, involves a B-17 bomb group that, under the command of an over-indulgent father-figure, sinks into the pit of high losses, self-pity, and spiralling morale. Why one group with a morale problem threatens to lose the war for America, according to the authors, is that the 918th's impending collapse comes early in the war, in the Fall of 1942, when many military leaders in America and Britain are critical of AAF theories on strategic bombing. Just when the AAF is under great pressure to get results quickly, when critics will use any excuse to end the effort to prove the daylight precision bombing theory, one of the few groups operating in England seems about to fold.⁷³

The movie does not go into such specific detail, but it does make the same point and it does so in the powerful visual imagery that made it the tenth most popular movie of 1950. The movie also attached the aura of a major star like Gregory Peck to the message. The film's production team included four figures sympathetic to the air power cause. Beirne Lay and Sy Bartlett wrote the screenplay, producer Darryl F. Zanuck had made

Winged Victory during the war and was a charter member of the Air Power League, while the director, Henry King, was a noted pilot and an AAF veteran of World War II.⁷⁴ The movie was dedicated to the men who made daylight precision bombing possible: “They stood alone, against the enemy and against doubts from home and abroad.” In a critical scene that tells the audience why it should care, why this group is not just any American fighting unit, “General Pritchard,” who commands the four AAF bombing groups in England, tells “General Savage,” played by Gregory Peck, “There’s only one hope of shortening this war: daylight precision bombing. If we fold, daylight bombing is done with; and I don’t know, maybe it means the whole show. We could lose the war if we don’t knock out German industry.”⁷⁵

Both the book and the film highlight the effort to paralyze German industry by bombing ball-bearing factories, and in this they showcased the core of America’s strategic bombing doctrine. In each version the justification for launching the dangerous mission is that by knocking out this one critical set of targets strategic bombing will have a magnified effect that will cripple the entire German war effort. The motif of the ball-bearing effort was based on the 1943 Schweinfurt-Regensburg raid and it is no surprise that the authors would highlight this particular mission. Aside from its notoriety as one of the bloodiest bombing raids of the war, Lay had gone along on the raid as an observer and had written a report for Curtis LeMay, the mission leader, that was published “almost verbatim” by *The Saturday Evening Post*.⁷⁶ In both the novel and the movie the 918th successfully bombs the target and the message is clear: “Savage” has rebuilt the group into an efficient weapon and saves strategic bombing, though in the movie it comes at a cost to “Savage”

of a nervous breakdown. The ultimate meaning of the salvation of daylight precision bombing is also clear. Because of the efforts of men like "Savage," strategic bombing prevailed over its critics and doubters and this secret weapon went on to win the war.

The salvation of daylight precision bombing and its importance to the war effort, as depicted in this movie, along with its success at the box office, made *Twelve O'clock High* one of the most effective tools in enshrining the mythology surrounding America's strategic bombing doctrine in the nation's popular imagination. Not only was daylight precision bombing portrayed as a secret weapon based on Yankee ingenuity, it also pictured the Eighth Air Force as a heroic underdog winning against the odds. To the extent that postwar Americans understood the finer points of the bombing doctrine's specific tenets, their understanding was quite likely shaped or crystallized by the book and especially the movie. The image that *Twelve O'clock High* put before the public, though, was one of bombing solidly within the tradition of the ACTS. The tone throughout both the novel and the movie is one which extolls the AAF's bombing as efficient, progressive, almost scientific. It is a precise surgical instrument operating on only the nerve centers, leaving the vaunted German war machine unable to function. Bombing accuracy is touted throughout, to the point that, in perhaps one of the movie's best known scenes, and at subsequent points thereafter in both works, any bombardier who's accuracy is not up to the group's standards is publicly humiliated by being relegated to "The Leper Colony."

Needless to say, the Air Force was as anxious to help with *Twelve O'clock High* as Zanuck was desperate to have Air Force assistance. In asking for aid Zanuck wrote directly to Air Force Chief of Staff Hoyt Vandenberg, and Vandenberg got personally

involved with helping production, for example by giving his wartime friend, director Henry King, wide latitude in his use of Air Force facilities. The Air Force even gave Zanuck and Twentieth Century-Fox a commendation for producing the movie, citing its “impressive portrayal of Eighth Air Force activities during the early stages of World War II.”⁷⁷ Air Force involvement, though, did little in shaping the plot or the script. The Air Force did object to minor plot elements, such as frequent drinking, ramming a B-17 with a tractor so it could be listed as destroyed and then used for spare parts, and a few technical errors, all of which were omitted from the film.⁷⁸ Throughout its involvement, though, the Air Force did not attempt to influence the film’s depiction of strategic bombing’s contribution to the overall war effort. In fact, the principle reaction of all Air Force people who commented on the book and the script was simply an overall impression that the story was remarkably accurate. When requesting copies of the film for educational use inside the Air Force, Major H.O. Parsons, Deputy Adjutant General of Air Training Command, stated simply that “It portrays forcefully the responsibilities of the combat unit commander as well as those of the individual crew member and the necessity of self-discipline to the welfare of the group.”⁷⁹ Thus the film’s depiction of the role of strategic bombing is, like the book, solely the product of Sy Bartlett and Beirne Lay.

The other major work of fiction dealing with the strategic bombing campaign was *Command Decision* by William Wister Haines. Haines had been a successful writer before World War II, and during the war he served in intelligence in the AAF, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel. After the war he wrote *Command Decision*, first as a play in 1946. The play was so successful it moved to Broadway where it became a hit and Haines

quickly brought out a novel version in 1947 that was serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly* and condensed in *Reader's Digest*. In 1948 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer turned the play into a movie that brought in over \$3 million and stood at eighteen on the list of the year's most popular movies. The movie's screenplay was coauthored by William R. Laidlaw, an Air Force Reserve colonel and veteran of the Eighth Air Force, and George Froeschel, and their script followed the play closely. Like *Twelve O'clock High*, the play, novel, and film versions of *Command Decision* do not specifically state that strategic bombing won the war single-handed. Instead, *Command Decision* claims overtly that air power could have won the war for Germany, and subtly that strategic bombing destroyed Germany's real fighting strength and virtually guaranteed allied victory.⁸⁰

Set in England in October 1943, about the time of the second Schweinfurt raid, the plot involves a fictional effort to knock out German production of the world's first combat jet aircraft. The plot clearly derives loosely from the Schweinfurt raids, for in both cases planners seek war-altering results through precision industrial bombing. The plot is also anachronistic for it hinges on the premise that in late 1943 Germany was poised to deploy the Messerschmitt 262 (called the Focke-Schmidt 1 in the play and the Lantze-Wolf 1 in the movie) in large enough numbers to seize air superiority and turn the tide of the war despite the fact that the ME-262 did not appear in combat until 1945.⁸¹ The prospect of attacking the three factories deep in German territory producing the jet fighter entails heavy losses and this sets up a three-way conflict among American war leaders that is the heart of story in all three versions of *Command Decision*. On one side of the conflict are the critics of air power and strategic bombing. Pitted against them is "Brigadier General

Casey Dennis," played in the movie by Clark Gable, who believes that without strategic bombing America will lose the war. The third element of conflict is Dennis' superior, "Major General Kane," who worries more about publicity and the institutional fortunes of the AAF and who realizes that critics will use heavy casualties as an excuse to kill strategic bombing and cut back the AAF. Haines uses this three-way conflict to narrow the focus down to the exact nature of the air power revolution.

As with *Twelve O'clock High* the action takes place at a critical time in the evolution of the strategic bombing campaign. In this case, just as a bombing campaign is set to decide the fate of the war the Joint Chiefs are about to hold a meeting to reallocate resources for the entire war effort. For Kane this upcoming reallocation is critical, for chief among the AAF's critics is the Navy, and as Haines states through one of his characters, admirals make up half of the Joint Chiefs and they do not believe strategic bombing can work.⁸² When Kane learns that Dennis has started the long-planned operation, bearing the leading code-name Stitch, for "a stitch in time," on the eve of the reallocation meeting he orders Dennis to suspend the operation until after the meeting. Dennis argues that this will allow a rare stretch of good weather crucial to the operation's success to go unexploited, and with winter coming on they will probably not get such a stretch of good weather again until after the German jets have turned the tide of battle.

This sets the stage for a confrontation between the two that allows Haines to illustrate his notion of the true nature of air power. Kane recounts his experiences in the interwar Air Corps when the early pioneers of American air power flew obsolete aircraft, died carrying the air mail, and did everything they could to build public support. Now that

they are on the verge of building a true air force, including a strategic bombing force that can win the war, Dennis is throwing the whole thing in jeopardy by incurring shocking losses. At one point he asks Dennis:

Do you realize how much the Navy wants our planes, for sub-patrol - and to protect the repairing of those battleships that air power couldn't hurt? Do you know how much the Army wants our pilots for company commanders? Don't you know the British want us to switch to night area bombardment?... Don't you realize the fight its taken...to get us any planes at all?... And with time and planes and support we can [demolish] every factory in Europe. But the decision is at stake now.⁸³

Dennis counters that the promise of a future air force will mean nothing if Germany seized aerial supremacy. Strategic bombing was the only means to prevent that from happening, but it had to be used immediately regardless of costs. In either case air power will decide the course of the war according to Haines. German tactical air power can deny allied victory, but American strategic bombing will guarantee it. At one point Dennis tells Kane:

Sir, wars are lost by waiting. The Allies waited at Munich. The French and British waited behind the Maginot Line.... But if we wait...we'll be waiting for the Germans to put a roof on the continent, ...to confront our armies on D-Day at the Channel with an air force that's already whipped us. I'm not trying to tell you that Operation Stitch will win the war. But no battle, anywhere in this war, has been won without aerial supremacy. Operation Stitch is the price of that.⁸⁴

Command Decision even fits the strategic bombing campaign's high casualty rate into the context of the air power revolution. Whereas *Twelve O'clock High* treats casualties as a price of combat which can be reduced through good leadership, morale, and tactics, *Command Decision* treats the high casualty rate as a relatively small price to pay to avoid even higher casualties on the ground. In a scene near the end of both the play and the movie General Dennis' replacement asks the advice of his intelligence officer,

an old World War I artillery “retread.” The major tells the general that if the German jet factories are not destroyed his (the major’s) son in the infantry, and all the other infantry troops, will have to go up against the jets when they invade Europe. When the general asks what the major would do if his son was in one of their B-17s the major replies that he hopes he would still send the mission against the jet factories. The impression conveyed to the audience is that air power dictates the level of lethality in ground combat. Either the bombers suffer a relatively smaller number of casualties in the air or the ground forces will suffer greater casualties at the hands of superior German air power.⁸⁵

One key element of Haines’ depiction of strategic bombing is how Dennis succeeds in winning over the critics and doubters who appear in the story. Nearly everyone who is converted appears as a sensible individual throughout the work, and the rare individuals who do not come around to Dennis’ arguments appear from start to finish as boorish louts. Kane, for example, appears as an unsympathetic schemer who’s best days are long since past. He knows Dennis is right but surrenders to his own fears and fires Dennis for insisting on continuing the operation.⁸⁶ In the midst of the prolonged confrontation a congressional committee appears, and one of its members, Representative Malcolm, is portrayed as a caricature of the loud-mouthed, offensive politician. He objects to the high casualties of the first two missions of Stitch and flatly rejects all explanations. He holds Dennis responsible for the casualties and badgers and abuses him to the point where, in the novel, Dennis knocks him unconscious. The other congressmen appear much more reasonable and willing to listen to Dennis’ explanations. Dennis eventually wins them over, and in the novel they force Malcolm to apologize to Dennis.⁸⁷ The two most

sympathetic characters, though, are Brockhurst, a war correspondent, and Sergeant Evans, Dennis' orderly. Initially Brockhurst considered Dennis a tyrannical butcher, and he intended to expose him as such in the press. He is one of the first to see the wisdom of Dennis' efforts and spends most of the story marveling at the stupidity of Dennis' critics.⁸⁸ At first Evans, the cynical NCO, considers Dennis just another general, but he too is converted and in the end gives up a comfortable state-side assignment to follow Dennis to his next command in the Pacific.⁸⁹ The impression this theme presents to the audience is that any intelligent, reasonable, progressive-thinking individual would grasp the inherent good sense of strategic bombing and support postwar air power based on bombing.

The Air Force liked what Haines said about the bombing campaign and was thus eager to help with the movie, but it did not like the way he said it, so it kept its aid informal and unofficial. At the Air Force's request it received no acknowledgment for its help in the film's credits.⁹⁰ As with *Twelve O'clock High*, though, the Air Force did not try to influence the film's depiction of strategic bombing's contribution to the war effort. Because of the nature of the play, most of the action takes place indoors and there are few flying sequences in the film, thus Air Force assistance was primarily limited to providing film footage and wardrobe.⁹¹

Despite the limited assistance the Air Force objected to the play's controversial aspects, particularly the depiction of relationships between Air Force officers and members of Congress. Some had not liked Haines' work from the start. LeMay, for example, told Sy Bartlett he welcomed *Twelve O'clock High* because he "need[ed] something to take the taste of *Command Decision* out of [his] mouth."⁹² In early stages of communications

with the studio, Major General F.L. Parks, Chief of Army Public Information, alluded to “obvious controversial elements” but stated, “I feel that a screenplay can be derived from it which will retain the dramatic values and still be approved for...cooperation.” Less than a year later, after reading the film’s first script, Major General Emmett O’Donnell, Jr., director of the Air Force’s Office of Information, expressed approval that the writers had removed Dennis’ assault on Congressman Malcolm, but still found fault with Kane’s assertion that interwar airmen had won favor with members of Congress by buying them liquor.⁹³ The line was removed from the final script. The Air Force did give public aid with the movie’s premiere by providing props, personnel, and the Air Force Band.⁹⁴ And the Air Force Association presented M-G-M with a citation of honor for the film at its Washington, D.C. premiere.⁹⁵ The film still remained controversial in Air Force eyes, though, for when Air Training Command requested copies for training purposes Major H.O. Parsons noted that, while the movie portrayed many important and worthwhile subjects, students would have to be briefed before seeing it that “unfavorable characterizations of certain persons...which may be true in some cases are not indorsed by the USAF as being truly representative of normal conditions.”⁹⁶

The postwar air power revolution was a continuation, and in a sense, a culmination of the interwar air power revolution. Air power advocates felt they had gained insight into a whole new era where all the old ways were outmoded. Their assertions about the new way to look at the planet and the need for new educational approaches to equip young people for life in the new era enhanced their public stature as theorists calling for a new

approach to warfare. Given that they saw things other people had never realized before, some might think, surely they must have a unique insight into the future of war. This at least was what air power advocates thought about themselves and what they hoped others would think. The images they presented about the revolution in warfare did appear to many as revolutionary. They were also appealing. Promises of quick, easy, and cheap victory had a powerful attraction for people with memories of two world wars. Between the revolutionary and the appealing imagery air power advocates succeeded dramatically in winning the American public over to their way of thinking. A 1949 Gallup poll showed that 74% of those surveyed felt the Air Force would play the greatest role in winning a future world war. When asked again in October 1953, after the Korean War had ended, the percentage of Americans expressing faith in air power jumped to 81%. Two years later when the question was asked for the last time that figure fell to 71%. This faith also translated into support for a larger Air Force. In 1952, in the midst of the Korean War, 54% of Americans surveyed said the Air Force should be built up further as opposed to 11% for the Army and 8% for the Navy. Four years later, when asked what additional defense money should be spent on, 59% called for more strategic air power weapons while only 14% called for more ground forces and 11% favored more aircraft carriers.⁹⁷

But their images were also too simplistic and combined contradictory traditions to mollify shocking implications if people thought about the images too deeply. All future wars, even before the Soviet Union emerged as the main adversary, appeared as generic conflicts that could be quickly resolved with the same prescription: strategic atomic bombing. There were no complicating prewar contexts that might suggest nuclear

devastation was not the answer. The war would be almost instantaneously fought and won with the adversary unable to counter, react to, or negate the effects of American bombing. And finally the postwar situation never intruded on the images of future war to suggest that the wholesale atomic bombing of one's adversary might have unanticipated side-effects such as anger and resentment among the defeated population or international opprobrium. Moreover, the traditions of Douhet and the ACTS, utter devastation versus surgical, scientific precision and efficiency, were conflated into one. The atomic bomber would obliterate all before it, but it would also paralyze the enemy's defenses and leave the innocent civilians thankful they had been spared. All of this while delivering the American people from fear and high casualties as well as easing the tax burden.

The images air power advocates placed before the American people through the popular culture campaign may have differed from the images that emerged from debate in other venues, such as newspapers, Congress or the Pentagon, but they were powerful images that shaped how average Americans viewed air power at a deep and visceral level. As such, the images of the air power revolution are important to understanding the overall place of air power in America during the Cold War. These popular culture images would change over the next decade and a half as a result of events throughout the period, but it is important to appreciate the contours and textures of the images created by the air power advocates as the halcyon days of the popular culture crusade came to an end.

1. The AAF reached a peak strength of 2,411,294 officers and enlisted members in 243 groups and 2,252 installations around the world during the war and purchased over 231,000 aircraft; Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 7, *Services Around the World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958; repr., Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 566, 569; Irving Brinton Holly, Jr., *Buying Aircraft: Matériel Procurement For the Army Air Forces*, United States Army in World War II (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1989), 548.
2. Many scholars have studied the American strategic bombing campaign of World War II, but four works that span the spectrum of debate are: Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987); Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgement: American Bombing in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Conrad C. Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); and David MacIsaac, *Strategic Bombing in World War II: The Story of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey* (New York: Garland Press, 1976).
3. An excellent example of the effects of another transportation revolution is Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), which examines the cultural impact of railroads on American and European society.
4. See, for example, Rhoda Hero Dunn, "The Aeronauts," *The Atlantic Monthly* 103 (May 1909): 617.
5. See, for example, William Mitchell, "Look Out Below!" *Collier's* (21 April 1928): 8-9, 41-42.
6. Leonard O. Packard, Bruce Overton, and Ben D. Wood, *Our Air Age World: A Textbook in Global Geography* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1944), frontispiece, 9. The fact that an entire geography book would be written from the "Air Age" perspective is another indication of the wide acceptance of air power's "revolutionary world view."
7. William Bradford Huie, "How Will the Next War Be Fought?" *The American Mercury* (April 1946): 432-33; W.B. Courtney, "Will Russia Rule the Air?" *Collier's* (25 January 1947): 12-13, 61; and (1 February 1947): 16, 67, 69.
8. Carl A. Spaatz, "Air Power in the Atomic Age," *Collier's* (8 December 1945): 11.
9. 18 June 1946 radio speech, Eaker Papers, Box II: 108, Speeches, 1946-49 folder, LOC; emphasis in original.
10. Air Power League, *Report to Members*, 12; and *Peace Through Air Power*, 4.

11. Alexander P. de Seversky, "We're Preparing for the Wrong War," *Look* (9 December 1947); and Alexander P. de Seversky, *Air Power: Key to Survival*, 307-13.
12. William V. Pratt, "Air Power in the Arctic: The Crux of Our Defense," *Newsweek* (25 March 1946): 39. For a good treatment of Pratt's career as an open-minded naval reformer see Gerald E. Wheeler, *Admiral William Veazie Pratt, U.S. Navy: A Sailor's Life* (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, 1974).
13. John Kord Lagemann, "The Handwriting on the Ice," *Collier's* (16 November 1946): 18-19, 39-42, emphasis in original.
14. "War Can Come; Will We Be Ready?" *Life* (27 February 1950): 21-22.
15. Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, see particularly chapter six.
16. Air Power League, *The Bulletin of the Air Power League* (August 1945), unpaginated, last page; Air Power League, *Report to Members*, 4.
17. "Air-Age Babes in Toyland," *Collier's* (27 August 1949): 74; for National Air Council see memoranda, 17 May 1951, from James C. Evans to Mr. Lennartson and to Mr. Burden, and letter, undated, author unknown, to C.S. Jones, president National Air Council, all in reel 33770, frames 239-43, AFHRA.
18. H.H. Arnold, "If War Comes Again," *New York Times Magazine* (18 November 1945): 39; H.H. Arnold, "Air Power for Peace," *The National Geographic Magazine* (February 1946): 193.
19. American Legion, *Keep America Strong in the Air* (October 1947), unpaginated, fourth page; advertisement for North American Aviation, "How Do You Rate in the AIR-Q Test?" *Collier's* (8 September 1945): 54.
20. Much has been written on the interwar drive for an independent Air Force. The best place to start is Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine*, particularly chapters 2 and 3. A wide range of perspectives can be found in Thomas H. Greer, *The Development of Air Doctrine in the Army Air Arm, 1917-1941* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: USAF Historical Division, Research Studies Institute, Air University, 1955; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1985), Sherry, *Rise of American Air Power*, and DeWitt S. Copp, *A Few Great Captains: The Men and Events That Shaped the Development of U.S. Air Power* (McLean, Va.: EPM Publications, 1980).
21. Less has been written on the subject of postwar efforts to secure an independent Air Force. Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine* is also a good place to start on this topic, as are Perry McCoy Smith, *The Air Force Plans for Peace, 1943-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1970), and Herman S. Wolk, *Planning and Organizing the Postwar Air Force, 1943-1947* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1984).

22. On the subject of military unification see Jeffery M. Dorwart, *Eberstadt and Forrestal: A National Security Partnership, 1909-1949* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), Michael S. Sherry, *Preparing for the Next War: American Plans and for Postwar Defense, 1941-1945* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977), and Demetrios Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification: A Study of Conflict and the Policy Process* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).

23. Arnold, "If War Comes Again," 39.

24. Beirne Lay, Jr., "Why Army, Navy and Air Must Combine at the Top," *Reader's Digest* (November 1945): 29, 32, emphasis in original; for Army position on military unification see Dorwart, *Eberstadt and Forrestal*, 72-77, and Caraley, *Politics of Military Unification*, 63-65.

25. Air Power League, *Pros and Cons: Unification of the Armed Forces* (New York: Air Power League, n.d.); Air Power League, "I Urge This as the Best Means of Keeping the Peace": *President Harry S. Truman* (New York: Air Power League, n.d.); both can be found on reel A-1797, frames 2294-2315, AFHRA.

26. Lay, "Why Army, Navy and Air Must Combine," 32; Air Power League, *Report to the Members of the Air Power League*, 13.

27. William Bradford Huie, *Case Against the Admirals*, see particularly 10-20.

28. See, for example, Parrish, "Behind the Sheltering Bomb," 182, 185.

29. The definitive biography on Mitchell is Alfred F. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell: Crusader for Air Power* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1964); for court martial see chapter six.

30. Arnold, *Global Mission*, 120.

31. De Seversky, *Victory Through Air Power*, iii and facing portrait of Mitchell; Emile Gauvreau and Lester Cohen, *Billy Mitchell, Founder of Our Air Force and Prophet Without Honor* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1942) and Isaac Don Levine, *Mitchell: Pioneer of Air Power* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1943).

32. Sample speech, Air Force Day - 1946, reel A-1619, frame 0936, AFHRA; Haines, *Command Decision: A Play*, 30; Haines, *Command Decision*, 157.

33. W.B. Courtney, "Air Power - Today and Tomorrow," *Collier's* (15 September 1945): 11.

34. Air Power League, *Peace Through Air Power*, 13.

35. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell*, 139.

36. Huie, *Case Against the Admirals*, passim; William Bradford Huie, "The Struggle for American Air Power," *Reader's Digest* (April 1949): 1.

37. Arnold, *Global Mission*, 114.

38. Huie, *Case Against the Admirals*, 12.

39. For a depiction of the medal, as well as the authorizing bill, see reel A-1656, frames 871, 877, 881; the medal bears a likeness of Mitchell on the face and an inscription on the reverse stating: "For outstanding pioneer service and foresight in the field of American military aviation."

40. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell*, 140; Straubel, *Crusade for Airpower*, 104-06.

41. Letters, 23 December 1941, Jack Warner to Arnold, 31 December 1941, Arnold to Warner, and 6 January 1942, Warner to Arnold, all in Arnold Papers, reel 28059, frames approximately 0425-28, AFHRA. Note: the frame numbers on this reel are extremely hard to read or, in most cases, nonexistent, therefore only a close approximation can be made.

42. Milton Sperling, prod., *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell* (Hollywood: Warner Brothers, 1955).

43. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell*, 101.

44. Carl Spaatz, "Strategic Air Power: Fulfillment of a Concept," *Foreign Affairs* (April 1946): 388-89.

45. Ibid, 396.

46. Harry Borowski, *A Hollow Threat: Strategic Air Power and Deterrence Before Korea* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), 38-39, 106.

47. Social and cultural attitudes toward nuclear weapons in the Cold War era have received a great deal of scholarly attention; for a balanced yet wide-ranging introduction see Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); Spencer R. Weart, *Nuclear Fears: A History of Images* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); Charles Wolfe, "Nuclear Country: The Atomic Bomb in Country Music," *The Journal of Country Music* (January 1978): 4-21; and a documentary film, Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, and Pierce Rafferty, prods. *The Atomic Cafe* (New York: The Archives Project, 1982).

48. Arnold, "If War Comes Again," 5, 38-39; Spaatz, "Air Power in the Atomic Age," 11. For the same theme see also William Bradford Huie, "How the Next War Will Be Fought," *American Mercury* (April 1946): 431.

49. Air Force Day, 1 August 1946, Publicity Package, reel A-1619, frames 0933-34, AFHRA.
50. Spaatz radio address, San Francisco, 30 July 1947, reel A-1618, frame 1059, AFHRA.
51. Courtney, "Air Power - Today and Tomorrow," 30; Arnold, "If War Comes Again," 39; Francis Vivian Drake, "Let's Be Realistic About the Atom Bomb," *Reader's Digest* (December 1945): 108-10, emphasis in original.
52. Arnold, "If War Comes Again," 39.
53. Air Power League, "Peace Through Air Power," 30, back cover; Carl Spaatz, "Air Power is Peace Power," CBS radio broadcast, 1 August 1947, Spaatz Papers, Box I: 268, LOC; William Bradford Huie, "The Facts Which *Must* Prevent War," *Reader's Digest* (January 1949): 25. According to Noel Parrish, Spaatz's political advisor, Harvard professor Bruce Hopper, suggested the slogan "Air Power is Peace Power" and further advised him to keep all advocacy activities focused on air power not air force, Parrish, "Behind the Sheltering Bomb," 131, 154.
54. Carl Spaatz, "If We Should Have to Fight Again," *Life* (5 July 1948): 35, 39; Carl Spaatz, "The Era of Air-Power Diplomacy," *Newsweek* (20 September 1948): 26.
55. Huie, "How the Next War Will Be Fought," 434-35.
56. "Blueprint for a 30-Day War," *U.S. News and World Report* (15 October 1948): 15-16.
57. Russell V. Ritchey, "What Would You Do?" *Collier's* (26 June 1948): 28.
58. Stuart Chase, "The Two-Hour War," *The New Republic* (8 May 1929): 325-27; Chase was no fan of air power, but he had become so convinced that air power had the capability to swiftly bring national chaos and collapse with one raid on a nation's capital that he wrote this piece as a warning to try and curb the growth of air forces around the world.
59. De Seversky, *Air Power: Key to Survival*, 61-63, 111-14, 146-50, 153-60, 182-98.
60. Ibid, see particularly chapter 12, quote from 185.
61. Borowski, *A Hollow Threat*, 183, note 15.
62. Spaatz, "Strategic Air Power," 393, 396; Spaatz, "Era of Air Power Diplomacy," 26; Carl Spaatz, "Strategic Air Power Against Germany," *Newsweek* (7 March 1949): 28.

63. Public Affairs Office Air Force Day Publicity Package, 1946, reel A-1619, frames 0933-34, AFHRA.

64. H.H. Arnold, radio address, 14 February 1946, Philadelphia, reel A-1618, frame 0905, AFHRA.

65. W.B. Courtney, "Air Power - Today and Tomorrow," *Colliers* (8 September 1945): 11, and (15 September 1945): 24.

66. Air Power League, *Bulletin of the Air Power League* (August 1945): 1.

67. De Seversky, *Air Power: Key to Survival*, 31, 43, 199-200.

68. The indispensable resource for understanding the USSBS is David MacIsaac, *Strategic Bombing in World War II: The Story of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976).

69. Spaatz, "Strategic Air Power Against Germany," 28.

70. James G. Stahlman, "The Strategic Bombing Myth," (privately published, 1949): cover letter, 18-25, 36-52.

71. Fletcher Pratt, "The Case for the Aircraft Carrier," *Reader's Digest* (May 1949): 54; Francis V. Drake, "The Case for Land-Based Air Power," *Reader's Digest* (May 1949): 61-62.

72. Beirne Lay, Jr. and Sy Bartlett, *Twelve O'clock High!* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1948), 5-6.

73. Ibid, 11, 17-18.

74. "Top Grosses of 1950," *Variety* (3 January 1951): 58; Rubin, *Combat Films*, 138-39.

75. Darryl F. Zanuck, prod., *Twelve O'clock High* (Hollywood: Twentieth Century Fox, 1949).

76. Ibid, 129. For Lay's description of the Schweinfurt - Regensburg raid see Beirne Lay, Jr., "I Saw Regensburg Destroyed," *Saturday Evening Post* (6 November 1943): 9-11, 85-88. For studies of the Schweinfurt - Regensburg raid see Thomas M. Coffey, *Decision Over Schweinfurt: The U.S. 8th Air Force Battle for Daylight Bombing* (New York: Robert Hale, 1977) and Martin Middlebrook, *The Schweinfurt - Regensburg Mission* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983).

77. Letter, 17 September 1948, Zanuck to Vandenberg, Record Group 330, Entry 140, Box 677, *Twelve O'clock High* folder, National Archives; Twentieth Century-Fox had earlier requested official Air Force support for the film and had been given a preliminary

promise for assistance from the Air Force contingent upon final script approval and two changes in the projected plot; see letters, 3 November 1947, Anthony Muto, Washington representative for Twentieth Century-Fox, to Donald E. Baruch, Director of Air Information Division, and 17 November 1947, William P. Nukols, Deputy Director Air Information Division, to Anthony Muto, *ibid*; for King's relationship to Vandenberg see Rubin, *Combat Films*, 138-39; of this connection Rubin states that based on his friendship with King "Vandenberg cheerfully gave the director carte blanche at Eglin," where much of the filming was done; for Air Force citation see memorandum, 13 February 1950, William C. Lindley, Chief, Staff Liaison Branch, Directorate of Public Relations, to Col. Roberts, executive to the Chief of Staff, Record Group 340, Entry 36, Box 4, Twelve O'clock High folder, National Archives.

78. Letter, 17 November 1948, William Nuckols to Anthony Muto, Record Group 330, Entry 140, Box 677, Twelve O'clock High folder, National Archives.
79. Letter, 25 May 1951, Parsons to Director of Training, Headquarters Air Force, Record Group 330, Entry 140, Box 677, Twelve O'clock High folder, National Archives.
80. Kinsman, *Contemporary Authors: Permanent Series*, 258-59; "Top Grossers of 1949," *Variety* (4 January 1950): 32.
81. William Wister Haines, *Command Decision: A Play* (New York: Random House, 1947), 37-42; William Wister Haines, *Command Decision* [novel] (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1947), 63-69; Sidney Franklin, prod., *Command Decision* (Hollywood: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1949).
82. Haines, *Command Decision: A Play*, 43.
83. *Ibid*, 87-88.
84. *Ibid*, 98.
85. Haines, *Command Decision: A Play*, 90, 166.
86. *Ibid*, 130-34, 141-42; Haines, *Command Decision*, 163-64.
87. Haines, *Command Decision: A Play*, 134-36, 140-41; Haines, *Command Decision*, 232-36.
88. Haines, *Command Decision: A Play*, 5-9; Haines, *Command Decision*, 235-36.
89. Haines, *Command Decision: A Play*, 5-10, 152-54, 179-80; Haines, *Command Decision*, 236-40.

90. See letters, 12 March and 18 May 1948, William Nuckols, Director of Air Information, to Carter Barron, Washington, D.C. representative for M-G-M, Record Group 330, Entry 141, Box 702, Command Decision folder, National Archives.

91. See letters, 10 July 1947, Sidney Franklin, the films producer, to Major General Emmett O'Donnell, Director of Information, and 19 March 1948, Carter Barron to Joe Yovin, Pictorial Section, Air Information Division, both Record Group 330, Entry 141, Box 702, Command Decision folder, National Archives.

92. Letter, 9 April 1948, LeMay to Bartlett, LeMay Papers, Container A-1, Bartlett folder, LOC.

93. See letters, 18 April 1947, Parks to Carter Barron, and 2 March 1948, O'Donnell to Sidney Franklin, both Record Group 330, Entry 141, Box 702, Command Decision folder, National Archives.

94. See message, 15 December 1948, from Lieutenant Colonel Evans to a Captain Harris, and Memo for Record, 2 February 1949, written by Joe Yovin and Donald Baruch, both Record Group 330, Entry 141, Box 702, Command Decision folder, National Archives.

95. Farmer, *Celluloid Wings*, 261-62.

96. Letter, 25 May 1951, Parsons, Deputy Adjutant General of Air Training Command, to Director of Training, Headquarters Air Force, Record Group 330, Entry 140, Box 677, Twelve O'clock High folder, National Archives.

97. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 858-59, 1108, 1186, 1321, 1429.

CHAPTER 6

THE REVOLUTION UNDER FIRE, 1949-1953

The air power advocates' claims that air power had revolutionized warfare did not go unchallenged. Not only did critics publicly dispute their conception of air power and national defense, but other events arose that raised serious questions about the air power advocates' priorities and theories. The challenges during this period included the Revolt of the Admirals, the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb, and the outbreak of the Korean War. Each in its own way threatened not only the air power advocates' devotion to strategic bombing, but also the image of air power that its adherents sought to popularize in the public imagination. In meeting each of these trials the air power advocates not only kept strategic bombing solidly in the center of their image, they also managed to fold air defense and tactical air power into their vision and make it even more attractive to the public. By the end of the period strategic bombing would be so firmly entrenched in the image of air power that it would become the dominant feature of the popular culture campaign throughout much of the fifties.

This period also saw changes in the shape and character of the popular culture campaign. First, it became institutionalized in that the main air power institution, the Air Force, became responsible to some degree for claims and statements made by air power

advocates. For example, the events leading to the Revolt of the Admirals were in part precipitated and aggravated by the writings of noted air power advocates. But this was a reciprocal relationship, for the fate of the air power revolution became tied to the actions of the Air Force. Even if the Air Force was wrong, as for example in neglecting tactical air power before Korea, air power's defenders followed one of two courses. They either denied the problem or fixed blamed on someone or something else, but they never blamed the Air Force publicly, for that would weaken the air power cause. Second, while it may seem hard to believe when looking at some things air power advocates wrote during this period, compared to the rhetoric of earlier periods their claims became more realistic and responsible. There was no more talk of a handful of planes bringing victory in a matter of days. Sometimes they also brought bad news; General Vandenberg, for example, made pessimistic statements on air defense. Also with the Air Force responsible for living up to the promises made for air power its partisans had to live with reality to some degree. No amount of verbal smokescreen could hide the blatantly obvious.

Third, the ranks of air power advocates would lose one face and gain several others. After playing a significant role in the days leading to the Revolt of the Admirals William Bradford Huie would, for all practical purposes, disappear from the public air power scene. Taking his place would be Harold H. Martin and Wesley Price, both writing for *The Saturday Evening Post*, and Fletcher Knebel, a writer for *Look*. Together they would contribute a significant number of articles highly supportive of air power. The cause was also aided by what appears to be an increase in patriotic spirit among the popular magazines most likely brought on by the heightened Cold War tension and the

Korean War. Magazines like *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, and *Look* had been willing to publish air power articles before, but in this period the frequency increased noticeably, and highly complimentary pieces came from unnamed editors or writers not usually associated with the air power cause. These magazines gave supportive treatment to other branches of the military, but their articles on air power usually adhered so closely to the air power “party line” that they amply supplemented the writings of known air power advocates. In this regard it is important to keep in mind that many leading figures controlling most of these magazines had maintained at some time or another ties with air power advocacy groups.¹ Together with the air power advocates they would help the air power revolution meet the challenges of this period and establish the air power image more firmly within popular culture.

THE REVOLT OF THE ADMIRALS AND THE POPULAR CULTURE CRUSADE

The first challenge to the air power revolution was an affair commonly known as the Revolt of the Admirals. In 1949 the Navy launched a two-pronged attack on the heart of the air power cause, an attack that questioned the effectiveness of Air Force strategic bombing and the wisdom of relying on it as the cornerstone of national defense.² The “revolt” clearly resulted from a combination of interservice competition for inadequate defense budgets, the Navy’s quest for a nuclear role, and legitimate concerns about America’s reliance on strategic bombing. When the full scope of the popular culture campaign is considered, though, another element emerges which undoubtedly contributed to the Navy’s assault on the most fundamental tenet of the air power revolution. Ever

since the end of the war air power advocates had kept up a steady drumbeat before the general public assailing the Navy at every turn. Attacks were occasionally launched against the Army as well, but they were rare. The anti-Navy campaign, on the other hand, questioned not only fundamental aspects of the Navy's mission, but quite often the Navy's very existence.

The early phase of the anti-Navy campaign involved more than just the Navy's obstruction of unification efforts. In 1946, for example, the Air Power League stated that air power had reduced the Army and Navy to "merely time-bound auxiliaries.³ That same year de Seversky fired a broadside at the Navy with an article appearing in Huie's *American Mercury* bearing the inflammatory title "Navies are Finished." Alluding to World War II, de Seversky stated that the Navy refused to acknowledge that "six years of a global war in which air power proved, in every instance, to be the decisive factor might cancel out 150 years of tradition." Even the Navy's seizure of island bases in the Pacific for the bombing assaults on Japan, according to de Seversky, were heroic but needlessly brought on by the Navy itself by its interwar opposition to the development of long-range bombers. Relegating the Navy to mere transportation support, de Seversky stated that "there simply is no fighting that navies can do which aviation cannot do more effectively and more quickly without their help."⁴ Four months later, Huie supplemented *The Case Against the Admirals*, his indictment of the Navy's resistance of unification, with another attack launched in *The American Mercury*. Detailing Navy resistance to new weapons during the war, Huie claimed that the Navy was unfit to act as the nation's primary

defense in an era of rapidly changing technology and defense options.⁵ Obviously these were assaults on more than the Navy's roles and missions or its stand on unification.

The attacks continued after the unification issue died down in 1947. In 1948 Huie resumed his assault on the Navy, first with an article in July charging that the Navy was undermining the new unification system, wasting taxpayer money on useless projects, and trying to build a bigger air force than the Air Force. Next in September he claimed that the Marine Corps was an outdated relic that needlessly duplicated the Army, and in December he made a similar charge about the Navy's air arm duplicating the Air Force and challenging it for the strategic bombing mission.⁶ Up to the end of 1948 the anti-Navy campaign was dominated by the twin firebrands of de Seversky and Huie. Other air power advocates either voiced only veiled criticisms or couched their charges in more temperate language. Spaatz, for example, stated in July that the "older services" did not understand the airmen's revolutionary zeal, and thus they put their faith in "'balanced force' based upon quantitative equality...rather than scientific balance in terms of a given military task." In a follow-on article he said of the Navy's attempt to acquire its own strategic bombing force, "airpower has thus made its final convert. The long-standing dispute between the Navy and the airmen...has devolved into a jurisdictional dispute...over splitting up the nation's total airpower." He questioned whether the nation could afford two air forces, but in the same article voiced support for a strong Army and Navy.⁷ With the start of 1949, however, the floodgates unleashed a torrent of attacks on the Navy from air power advocates, and while few matched Huie and de Seversky for strident haranguing, most were uniquely outspoken and direct in their criticism.

Air power advocates had begun to charge in 1948 that the Navy was trying to develop its own strategic bombing force, and this theme rose to a crescendo in the early months of 1949. Public attacks on the Navy, along with the wrangling over the nuclear role going on inside the Pentagon, stiffened Navy resolve to build the supercarrier *United States*. Spaatz inaugurated the new year and the new tone with an uncharacteristically sharp attack on naval aviation. Claiming that the Navy's air arm duplicated the Air Force, Spaatz stated that this threatened to starve both the Army and the Air Force as well as the Navy's submarine fleet. Citing World War II action in the Pacific, he claimed that aircraft carriers proved vulnerable to Japan's "second-rate air power" and would be even more vulnerable to Soviet air power or submarines. Reiterating his support for a strong Army and Navy, as well as strong land-based strategic air power, Spaatz stated that naval aviation's true role was helping the Navy keep the sea lanes open.⁸

De Seversky weighed in on the debate with an article in *The American Mercury* in which he stated that maintaining two air forces detracted from land-based strategic air power. Moreover, he claimed, it made no military sense because increased aircraft range had rendered aircraft carriers obsolete.⁹ Not surprisingly, Huie also joined in with two articles in succeeding issues of *Reader's Digest*. In March he charged that the Navy was afraid of being relegated to an inferior status behind the Air Force and was therefore using the supercarrier, which he claimed could not handle a plane big enough to carry an atomic bomb, as a ruse to gain a land-based strategic air force of their own. The next month Huie rehashed his 1942 book *The Fight For Air Power* to argue that the Army and the Navy,

the “Maginot minds, the yearners for Yesterday,” were still trying to suppress air power against the will of the people and the march of progress.¹⁰

The cancellation of the supercarrier *United States* by brand-new Secretary of Defense Louis A. Johnson in April 1949 prompted the Navy to launch a campaign, commonly known as the Revolt of the Admirals, to discredit the B-36 bomber and to challenge the nation’s reliance on strategic bombing. Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the affair came in April when Cedric R. Worth, a civilian working in Navy public relations, fabricated an anonymous document that circulated widely throughout the press and Congress. The document claimed that the Air Force knew the B-36 was inadequate but that corrupt dealings by the bomber’s manufacturer, Consolidated-Vultee, sustained its acquisition. Worth later recanted the charges but not before they prompted two sets of congressional hearings, the first in August to investigate the charges, and the second in October on interservice rivalry and differing conceptions of national defense.¹¹ While the cancellation undoubtedly enraged the Navy, the recently increased anti-Navy rhetoric of the air power popular culture campaign certainly contributed to the Navy’s desperation.

Supporters of the Navy rallied to their cause and responded in kind to the air power advocates’ charges. In the midst of the controversy, for example, James Stahlman printed and circulated a pamphlet arguing that strategic bombing accomplished little in the war to justify the heavy losses suffered by vulnerable bombers.¹² Navy advocates pointed to the numerous pro-air power articles in *Reader’s Digest* in recent months and asked for a chance to state their case. The editors did not quite grant equal time, but they did set up in the May issue a “point - counter-point” feature where Fletcher Pratt presented “The

Case for the Aircraft Carrier” and Francis Vivian Drake responded with “The Case for Land-based Air Power.” The two “cases” contested in a “rigged court,” for while Pratt got to state his case, Drake was given the opportunity to make his own case and respond to points raised by Pratt. Not only was Pratt not afforded the opportunity of rebuttal, but at no time had a naval partisan been given the opportunity to refute a pro-air power article as Drake was allowed with Pratt’s article. Still, Pratt did not help his cause when he made such obvious errors as claiming that no ship was sunk in World War II when it had escorting battleships, and such inconsistent statements as claiming atomic attacks against the Soviet Union would be counter-productive but that the Navy needed the supercarrier so it could launch nuclear attacks against targets deep inside the Russian heartland.¹³

A better effort came from Rear Admiral Daniel V. Gallery, in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Gallery, alluding to the anti-Navy campaign dating from December 1948, termed the air power message as one promising “quick and sure victory - at bargain rates.” Attacking this notion directly and Huie by name, he got right to the heart of the fallacy buried deep in the image postwar air power advocates presented about strategic atomic bombing. First, the nuclear blitz did not fit every foreseeable conflict with which America could be confronted, and thus the nation needed to maintain balanced land, sea, and air forces. “While we are devastating the cities of the enemy hinterland with intercontinental bombers, his ground army may be occupying the rest of Europe. What happens then? Do we blitz Paris, Rome and Brussels?” More important, he observed, air power advocates neglected postwar realities if such a war was won by atomic bombing:

“We are losing sight of the fundamental fact that war is simply a means to an end.... Wars are fought for political objectives, and the accomplishment of the objective doesn’t begin until the war is over.... Wholesale destruction of the populated areas of an enemy country is a poor way to promote a lasting peace.”

Gallery was quick to point out that he supported a strategic force of long-range bombers, and he saw a balanced and unified effort by the Army, Navy, and Air Force as the only approach to true national security. There was a strong tinge of hypocrisy in Gallery’s attack on strategic bombing, for the year before he had written a memorandum urging the Navy to make the strategic bombing role its main focus and to try to seize the role away from the Air Force. On the whole, though, it was an even-handed and insightful counter-offensive to the attacks led by Huie.¹⁴

Former war correspondent Richard Tregaskis weighed in on the side of the Navy in an October *Collier’s* article. While stating that the U.S. needed B-36s and the ability to launch nuclear attacks deep into Soviet territory, Tregaskis recounted the heavy losses suffered over Germany when bombers went beyond the range of fighter cover. Without new, bigger carriers to handle modern jet fighters to escort the B-36s, and fighter-bombers to launch atomic strikes against Soviet air defenses, Tregaskis claimed the B-36 crews would be “sitting ducks.” This especially because, according to Tregaskis, the B-36 was vulnerable to interception, that American fighters found it easy to intercept it, and that the Air Force was suppressing the results of these intercept tests. He also returned to the unification issue and stated that the current arrangement meant that “the Army - Air Force axis can in effect dictate Navy strategy.” As to the charge that the Navy was trying to “steal” the strategic bombing role away from the Air Force, Tregaskis noted that Navy

officials had repudiated the infamous Gallery memo and that Navy Secretary John L. Sullivan had publicly rebuked Gallery for his comments.¹⁵

Air power advocates were quick to defend both the B-36 and the concept of strategic bombing as a whole. In his reply to Pratt's article Drake called Pratt's argument a "jumble of contradictions and picturesque smokescreens" and charged that the Navy was growing less realistic about future warfare. In modern war the atomic bomb was such a revolutionary weapon that it had to play a key role in any American war plan and that could only be done through strategic bombing. In defending the B-36 Drake noted that the performance differential between it and modern jet fighters was much smaller at the B-36's operating altitude of 40,000 feet which, coupled with the expectation of attacking at night, meant that "at best interception is speculative." He even reassured his readers that at that altitude America's own best fighters could not intercept the B-36. Drake also struck back at the Navy by quoting the 1948 Navy memorandum written by Gallery:

the time is right now for the Navy to start an aggressive campaign aimed at proving that the Navy can deliver the atom bomb more effectively than the Air Force...if the Navy makes delivery of the atom bomb its major mission, the Navy can become the principal offensive branch of the national defense system.

Drake charged that the only reason the Navy attacked the B-36 was because it competed with Navy ambitions to acquire the nuclear role and thereby dominate national defense.¹⁶

Spaatz, too, joined the fray. He began on 9 May with an article aimed at an old sore spot for the Navy, the subject of unification. Arguing that the 1947 compromise was leading to greater service rivalry and no agreement on strategic planning, Spaatz called for a reorganization similar to the original plan backed by the Army and the old AAF: one

chief of staff commanding all three services under one civilian secretary. In a veiled allusion to the current crisis, Spaatz claimed that strategic priorities could not be set in the committee-style approach of the JCS as it stood at that time. He felt that one chief of staff, with advisors from all branches who would be removed to a separate promotion list to guard against service bias, could set strategic priorities which would then form the basis for dividing the defense budget.¹⁷ In his next installment, in the context of describing what he saw as a new sense of optimism in Western Europe, Spaatz attempted to minimize the impact of the Navy's charge that strategic bombing could not prevent a Soviet occupation of NATO countries. Spaatz ascribed Western Europe's new spirit, in part, to its faith in the atomic bomb and American air power. In a reference to the Navy's charge Spaatz stated: "Europeans feel safer because they know that American bombers give them a first line of defense. But they also realize that this line would not necessarily save them from occupation by ground forces in the early stages of another war." The reason, according to Spaatz, that they did not fear Soviet occupation in the early stages was because American aid was helping them rebuild their own ground forces to resist that invasion. Unmentioned in this article, though, is Spaatz's faith that strategic bombing would devastate Soviet industry thus making it possible for the stronger, but still outnumbered, Western European forces to drive the Red Army out of their territory.¹⁸

Spaatz's most direct reply came in July with an article detailing why the U.S. needed the B-36. As to its vulnerability Spaatz stated:

Much nonsense has been written about whether a fighter plane can climb as high and fly as fast as a B-36. During the second world war [sic] the Lancasters and Wellingtons of the RAF were excelled by the German fighters in speed, climb, and

altitude. Yet they operated successfully at night over Germany throughout the war. The B-17s in daylight, although exposed repeatedly to attacks by enemy fighters, operated successfully throughout the war.

He then added, without mentioning the heavy losses suffered in these attacks, that not one AAF bombing attack was ever turned back by either German or Japanese defenses.

Returning to the notion of the Red Army overrunning Europe Spaatz stated that in such an event Soviet submarines might block the Navy from approaching Europe thus leaving air strikes launched from the continental U.S. as the only means of striking back at Russia.

Spaatz followed up this counter-attack with another one month later that addressed the Navy charge that the Air Force's emphasis on strategic bombing was undermining tactical air forces. Despite a long trend in Air Force neglect of the tactical air mission, Spaatz insisted that the true culprit was the effort to support two redundant air forces in the Navy and the Air Force: "The total amount now being spent for air power by the United States is more than adequate. But it is not enough to support two air forces with duplicate establishments." This, according to Spaatz, prevented the Air Force from acquiring the forces it had long requested which left it weak in both strategic and tactical air power.¹⁹

As the Revolt of the Admirals wound down in October Arnold sounded a conciliatory note in a *Collier's* article. Sounding somewhat like Clemenceau, he stated that modern warfare had become too important to be formulated by service partisans in the arena of public opinion. Fixing equal blame on the Army, Navy, and Air Force, Arnold called for a "new kind of War Advisory or Planning Board" made up of high level civilians from industry, labor, and science, as well as retired four or five star flag officers from all three services. Together they would sort through all the claims and ideas from the

three branches and weigh them “in relation to our foreign policy, war and peace objectives, international conditions and our economic situation.”²⁰ Arnold could afford to be magnanimous. The B-36 had survived congressional scrutiny and the Air Force had been vindicated while the Navy had been chastised, Navy Secretary Sullivan had resigned, and CNO Admiral Louis Denfeld had been fired.²¹

In the battle waged in the popular culture arena air power had taken a few solid blows but air power advocates had defended their cause well enough that no serious harm had come to either the image of air power or strategic bombing. Spaatz met questions about bombings effectiveness in World War II by calling on the heroic tradition from that same war. Drake met questions of the B-36's vulnerability with facts and figures that made the air power case look very scientific. Ultimately, the charge that the Navy's attack was motivated by their own desire to acquire the strategic bombing mission put the Navy on the defensive and made air power seem that much more creditable. Gallery's charge that the air power advocates had forgotten that war is politics by other means, though, went unanswered. It did not have to be, for only three months later, in September, and half a world away an event took place that left the public less concerned about whether atomic bombs were suitable for every conceivable war and more worried about what atomic bombs might do in a war against America.

The Revolt of the Admirals took a lot out of the popular culture crusade. Whether because the public fight with the Navy was a sort of baptism-by-fire that led to a loss of innocence or because of the deadly serious business that followed hard on its heels, the end result was that air power message lost its simplistic character and its naiveté.

Increasingly afterward air power advocates would be the bearers of harsh realities urging Americans to “buck-up” and confront the “facts.” Also their message would stress more institutional themes, that is, rather than evangelizing an ethereal notion of “air power” they proclaimed that what was good for the Air Force, or more often SAC, was good for the country. Symbolic of the new spirit, the air power cause lost one of its more controversial figures. After the six month blitz that help precipitate the Revolt of the Admirals, Huie turned to other topics. Whether because of the attacks he suffered from Navy advocates or because he had had a change of heart, with the exception of a mild profile of LeMay in October 1950, he never wrote another pro-air power piece again. Within two months of the LeMay article, Huie was praising Forrestal, once one of Huie’s favorite targets, as a patriotic martyr to the war against Communism.²²

THE SOVIET BOMB AND THE IMAGE OF AIR POWER IN AMERICA

In September 1949 an American reconnaissance plane detected indications that the Soviet Union had exploded an atomic bomb. While some analysts had predicted that this could occur by 1949, few in America, particularly the general public, were prepared for it.²³ The nation was shocked, for now the image of an aerial attack devastating America was more than just science fiction or air power rhetoric. In a curious twist of fate, at the very time that air power advocates were striving to reassure Americans that the bomber would always get through, they faced a public desperate for reassurance that Soviet bombers would not. While it might appear at first glance that the air power advocates were now caught in a trap of their own making, as events would turn out this dilemma

actually worked in favor of the preferred air power role, strategic bombing. For while there would be considerable public clamor for effective air defense for North America, air power advocates would insist that no air defense, no matter how extensive, could stop a majority, let alone all, of the Russian bombers. Thus the main response to the Soviet atomic bomb among air power advocates was to stress the deterrent capability of a massive strategic bomber force. Air defense would become a vivid public image, but it is during this period that SAC and the nuclear bomber became the dominant image in popular culture synonymous with American air power.

In the early postwar years the air power advocates, in their effort to convince Americans that air power was a revolutionary weapon, had attempted to shock the public with graphic depictions of modern air warfare. As both Paul Boyer and Spencer Weart illustrate, postwar scientists who opposed the use of the atomic bomb had helped create the climate of fear in their effort to shock America into eschewing the bomb, but in their concurrent effort to reassure Americans that air power could use the bomb to guarantee their security, the air power advocates won out over the scientists.²⁴ In the wake of the Soviet bomb revelation it is clear that both groups had succeeded in planting nuclear fear deep within the popular imagination. Articles on bomb shelters and the likelihood or nature of a Soviet attack appeared overnight in magazines of every description. One reflection of this is that under the heading "Air Raid" in *Reader's Guide to Periodic Literature* prior to this event one finds no articles listed. The first edition after the Soviet bomb, however, shows not only a significant increase in articles listed under "Air Raid," but also two new categories, "Air Raid Shelters" and "Air Raid Alarms." The outpouring

of articles on air raid topics continued throughout the fifties and showed no abatement until the early sixties. In fact, the first edition of *Reader's Guide* to show a significant drop is the 1961-63 edition which spanned the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis and lists only four articles in all categories.²⁵

Fears had been growing about the size of the Soviet Air Force, so when they gained atomic capability fears of imminent air attack had already been primed. Air power advocates had been contributing to that fear. In 1947 W.B. Courtney drew on images of revolutionary air power to portray America locked in a struggle with Russia for aerial supremacy that would decide "moral, economic and political world leadership." He portrayed himself as a modern-day Paul Revere responding to a third lantern signaling that the new threat came by air. His grim assessment of America's standing versus the Soviets in air power: "Russia is in the lead on all points of foresight, research and future war potentials."²⁶ A 1947 American Legion pamphlet claimed that the Soviets had 40,000 aircraft compared to the combined total of only 28,000 for the Air Force and Navy. The pamphlet also stated that the Soviets dedicated 58% of their \$13 billion budget to their air arm while the U.S. devoted only 33% of its \$9 Billion dollar budget. The latter figure accounts for only the Air Force budget and does not include the substantial amount the Navy spent on aviation, and the source for the figure on the number of Soviet aircraft, a W.B. Courtney article in *Collier's*, actually puts that number closer to 32,000.²⁷ This playing fast-and-loose with facts that could be easily disproved seems astounding, but at the time the Legion sought to create the image that American air power had fallen behind

Soviet air power and that the gap was widening. Most people that the pamphlet aimed to influence would react to the fear without too much thought about the veracity of the facts.

A similar example of dealing in images not necessarily based on facts was the air power advocates' emphasis on the seventy-group plan. This plan had been shaped by the AAF in the closing days of World War II before any specific adversary had been identified, and in the postwar years it became a virtual shibboleth within the air power cause as the absolute minimum to protect America, yet the air power advocates never explained why the magic number seventy remained the same after the Soviets emerged as the main threat. Spaatz, for example, referred to the figure numerous times, including a *Newsweek* article one month before the Soviets exploded their bomb. In this article Spaatz once again bemoaned Congress' failure to provide for a seventy-group Air Force, authorizing instead only 48 groups. Not only would this action leave the Air Force too weak to meet its strategic and tactical missions, according to Spaatz, it would also concede to the Soviets their ambition to have the world's largest air force.²⁸

The image of a threatening Soviet air force became so pervasive by the late forties that other authors began writing about it. Writing in 1948 for *The Saturday Evening Post*, Wesley Price concluded that the Soviets were "spawning giant bombers and a hornet swarm of jet interceptors" and he quoted Air Force Secretary Stuart Symington that "Russia was building about twelve times as many planes as we were." Alluding to a potentiality that would soon become a reality, Price stated that "defense planners...must consider what our position would be if [Soviet bombers] should hit us after Russia acquires atomic bombs.... All our industrial centers would be under the gun." This image

was made even more threatening when in December of that same year Frank Kluckhohn reported in *Collier's* that the Soviets were massing air bases in Eastern Siberia within sight of the Bering Sea. Making the image seem even more immediate, he observed that these bases are "not more than a 3,000-mile flight to New York and most of industrial America, a distance well within the range of moderately new bombers." After an observation flight in an Air Force aircraft he claimed that the runways he saw seemed long enough to handle large bombers and that the Soviets were estimated to have 300 such bombers, capable of reaching New York. The Air Force had only 100 fighters in position to oppose them.²⁹

After the news of the Soviet bomb broke forth onto the American scene, the public felt that all the fearful images that had been created over the last four years were suddenly real and tangible. Having been told that air power was their only hope against an air power threat, the public naturally turned to air power and expected a solution. There was more at work here, though, than just the long series of promises and exhortations coming from air power advocates. The long tradition of technological messianism that had become intertwined with the cultural fascination with aviation also played a part. Stretching back to at least the late nineteenth century, people had been conditioned to expect that salvation from any threat, even a threat from the air, would come from the airplane. With this new threat the most obvious solution seemed to many to be the most direct, that is, to stop any Soviet bomber attack by shooting down the bombers.

Attention turned at many levels to the question of America's air defenses. Because of budget constraints and Air Force emphasis on the strategic bombing, air defense had languished prior to this point, as can be seen in the 1948 merger of Air Defense Command

and Tactical Air Command into one major command structure.³⁰ With the new crisis, however, members of Congress, responding to local concerns, began demanding greater efforts and the Air Force initiated a series of studies to consider options. From the beginning Air Force leaders resisted the idea of making the air defense role their highest priority, or even a priority equal to strategic bombing. They obviously could not ignore the problem and worked to increase their air defense capabilities, but with no increase in budget those new capabilities had to come at the expense of some other capabilities, largely tactical air forces.³¹ Estimating the earliest date that the Soviets would have sufficient nuclear weapons to launch an attack as 1 July 1952, Air Force planners set that same date as their goal for having an operational air defense system in place. Their main efforts focused on joint ventures with Canada in building an early warning radar network and aircraft interceptor facilities across the northern fringes of North America, marshaling the scientific community to find more effective air defense methods, enlisting public support in the Ground Observer Corps to supplement radar coverage, and increasing the effectiveness of the Air National Guard in the air defense role.³²

Another key strategy, though, involved turning public opinion to the Air Force's and the air power advocates' way of thinking, and here the popular culture campaign was a primary tool. Air power advocates clearly preferred strategic nuclear deterrence as the primary response to Soviet nuclear capability, but here they walked a tightrope in making their case. Sensing the public mood for air defense they were loath to squash public faith in air power, even if it was not the preferred strategy, so while they voiced support for greater air defense capabilities, they subtly worked in notes of caution with their message.

Spaatz's reaction in his *Newsweek* column is a good example. Immediately after the official announcement of the Soviet detonation, Spaatz called for a radar warning net and increased numbers of air defense squadrons armed with the latest jet interceptors and he stated that the seventy-group plan might need to be revised upwards. He was also quick to state, though, that the U.S. should continue to build up its nuclear stockpile and that the "strategic-bomber force should be increased to at least the number contemplated in the 70-group program." His next installment extolled advances made in air defense capabilities and called for immediate efforts to build an effective radar warning system. He cautioned, however, that such a system would have limits: "While well-organized defenses might not prevent a raid, they would certainly minimize its effects. They could avert disaster."³³

Air power advocates focused their main efforts, though, on convincing the public that strategic bombing must remain the main defense against Soviet attack on America. For years air power advocates had promised that the bomber would always get through. In the early postwar years they trumpeted the fact that no World War II bombing mission had ever been turned back. In the Revolt of the Admirals they used the same approach to deflect criticism of bomber vulnerability, and now they used that faith to tell the American public that the only way to stop a Soviet attack was to deter it by threatening swift nuclear retaliation. One month after calling for greater air defenses, for example, Spaatz observed in his column that the "ability to launch a powerful retaliatory offensive is still our best defense against atomic attack." And in a piece written on the eve of the Korean War he stated "the atomic bomb and strategic air power are primary factors maintaining the balance of military power and thus the peace of the world."³⁴

Not surprising, the most blunt and controversial argument came from de Seversky in his 1950 book *Air Power: Key to Survival*. De Seversky did not totally dismiss the notion of air defense and conceded that America would fight for aerial supremacy over North America as well as over the Soviet Union, but he was emphatic that the best defense was a good offense. In describing the ultimate consequences of his vision he pulled no punches:

When we reduce the enemy's aerial might, we reduce his ability to deliver destruction, the atomic kind included. Should we succeed in keeping him out of our skies altogether, we will for all practical purposes have eliminated the atomic threat. True, the enemy will probably crash through to drop bombs - many or few - despite everything. But he will know that these cannot score a decision. He will be acutely aware that his own skies are wide open to our aircraft for overwhelming punishment.... As in any other type of bombing, the final outcome will be decided by the relative ability of belligerents to absorb punishment while carrying more of it to the enemy.³⁵

This “stiff upper lip” view of air power strategy was a recurring theme throughout de Seversky’s book for he saw no way around massive casualties and derided those who offered anything but the hard facts to the America public.³⁶

Perhaps the most influential statement of the faith in deterrence over air defense came from Air Force Chief of Staff Hoyt Vandenberg. In a 1951 *Saturday Evening Post* article Vandenberg made a pointed effort to disabuse the public of the notion that an air defense system could ever provide a reasonable amount of security in the event of a concerted Soviet attack. Drawing on World War II analogies he claimed that Britain throughout the war shot down only 10% of the German bombers sent against their homeland despite having to guard an area only one thirtieth the area America must face. He also elaborated on the difficulties inherent in aircraft interception and destruction, and

estimated that the best the Air Force could hope for was to shoot down 30% of an attacking bomber force. Summing up the dilemma Vandenberg stated:

There is a dangerous delusion that radar screens and complicated electronic devices will give us an airtight defense against bombing. We could tackle an engineering project that would make the Great Wall of China look like the sand trenches children dig at the seashore. We could build a steel fence five miles high around the 17,936-mile perimeter of the United States. We could place an unbroken line of radar screens on top of the fence, ring our cities with automatic antiaircraft guns.... We could put an umbrella of interceptor planes over the entire country - and we could not keep out a determined enemy attacking in strength.

Moreover, Vandenberg added, such a system would take so much money and manpower it would render Korean forces ineffective and abandon NATO allies to Soviet occupation.³⁷

The only true security, according to Vandenberg, came from strategic bombing, but the hope he offered had a shocking image implicit in its promise. Strategic bombing was America's first line of defense, Vandenberg stated, because it deterred the atomic attack Americans so feared, but if that attack should come American bombers would defend America by destroying Soviet bombers at their airfield and factory sources. How American bombers were supposed to destroy Soviet bombers at their source *after* they had launched an attack against America Vandenberg did not say, but since America had eschewed a preemptive strike, the only thing he could mean was a nuclear war of attrition. Vandenberg was straight-forward in stating that this would mean America was vulnerable to "frightful loss of life and attendant property damage," but he also said that once Americans understood it his scenario "may not be so terrifying as it first appeared." In short, Americans were supposed to take comfort in the fact that whatever devastation they

experienced in a nuclear attack dwarfed in comparison to the vengeful holocaust visited in their memory upon the Soviet Union.³⁸

Many opposed the Air Force's lack of emphasis on air defense and continued to insist that a system could be developed that worked better than the dire predictions of people like Vandenberg. One such person was Vannevar Bush, former Vice President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development during World War II. While Bush did not discount the role of strategic nuclear bombing entirely, he saw it as part of an over-all balanced force. More important, he foresaw potential for effective new weapons in stopping enemy bombers. In a November 1949 *Life* article he predicted that developments in jet interceptors and guided missiles would inevitably give the defense an advantage over bombers. Little more than a year later he repeated much the same message in *Reader's Digest* and stated that advances in radar, missiles, and jet interceptors "may make it increasingly impractical to penetrate to prime targets." Bush urged that the strategic bombing forces learn to defeat such systems if they were to have any hope of penetrating Soviet defenses. And in terms of an American air defense system based on such innovations he stated "We should not let anything stand in the way of bringing it to full fruition at an early date."³⁹

Two of the harshest critics of the Air Force's air defense measures, though, were the Alsop brothers, Joseph and Stewart, who together served as long-time defense correspondents for the New York *Herald Tribune*. In 1953 they learned of the Lincoln Project, a study group formed by MIT to examine the air defense problem for the Air Force. Air Force leaders felt the group's work confirmed their belief that there would be

no affordable new or dramatic improvements in air defense in the foreseeable future, but the Alsops claimed the Air Force was turning a blind eye to this “official warning that the United States had become nakedly vulnerable to Soviet air attack with atomic weapons.”⁴⁰ In March Stewart broke the news of the Lincoln Project in a *Saturday Evening Post* article co-authored with a noted scientist, Ralph E. Lapp. The two authors gave a detailed description of numerous innovative systems, some still in development and some only theoretical, ranging from new types of radar and acoustic locating devices to guided missiles and pilotless drones. They also presented as new, ideas that were relatively old. For example, they spoke of the polar concept as if they had just discovered the secret and were sharing it with the public for the first time.⁴¹

More important is the fact that they were in effect playing on the old theme of technical messianism by offering a new brand of savior to deliver the nation from a new danger. In describing how several of these systems will interact they claimed:

[scientists] even foresee a time when these wonderful machines will actually control the interception of enemy bombers, making the whole defense operation automatic, from the blip on the radar screen to the destruction of the invading enemy. This sounds like science fiction. But practical men are now pressing forward with the experiments in this eerie new field.

The new system would not be cheap. It would cost as much as \$20 billion. It would, though, destroy 85-95% of any incoming bomber force and protect America until the day when intercontinental missiles, which were also only theoretical but which the authors claimed would not be practical for many years, made the system obsolete. When the Air Force and the press ignored them, the Alsops charged that partisan interests in the Air Force and apathetic newsmen were standing in the way of the safety of the nation.⁴²

A more balanced argument came from James R. Killian, Jr., President of MIT, and A.G. Hill, Director of MIT's Lincoln Laboratory, which grew out of the Lincoln Project. Urging a balance between offensive strategic forces and defensive air power, the authors argued that there was little use in Vandenberg's vision of victory in a nuclear war if America was devastated beyond the point of maintaining its way of life. The authors supported the notion of SAC as the nation's first line of defense to deter a Soviet attack but charged that SAC needlessly worried that air defense might detract from their offensive capability because in the authors' opinion America could support both systems adequately. Stressing their opinion that the Air Force was as committed to air defense as they were, the authors consciously limited their rhetoric by stating that a perfect defensive system was impossible to achieve, but that affordable improvements would greatly increase the percentage of enemy bombers destroyed short of their targets. The authors also dismissed the notion that such a system, as the Alsop's had claimed, would stop 95% of incoming bombers, and while they did not quote a dollar figure, they assured the public that the \$20 billion figure quoted by the Alsops was greatly exaggerated.⁴³

Despite charges of neglect, the Air Force was committed to providing the best air defense possible with the money Congress provided, as long as it did not detract from strategic bombing capability. The Air Force still tried to discourage hope for a miracle air defense panacea. Its radio advertisements calling for volunteers for the Ground Observer Corps, for example, created images of an air defense system so weak that it desperately needed thousands of civilians to help plug the gaps. One such radio spot declared, "the Reds right now have about a thousand bombers that are quite capable of destroying at

least 89 American cities in one raid.... Won't you help protect your country, your town, your children?"⁴⁴ At times the efforts of its supporters to paint a rosy picture of air defense capabilities even left the Air Force concerned that such optimistic presentations were counter-productive. The Air Defense Command, for example, felt that a 1952 *Saturday Evening Post* article exaggerated their capabilities and might discourage Ground Observer Corps enlistment by giving the impression that there was little need for further sacrifice.⁴⁵

The inherent problem with the question of air defense, though, was that despite their genuine support for it, air power advocates would always see any role other than strategic bombing as detracting from the primary mission because they never felt that they had enough air power, especially strategic air power. It was an open-ended dilemma that became a regular feature of the popular culture debate. For years air power advocates clung to the 70-group plan when they could not get support for such a high level. With the outbreak of the Korean War the Air Force began growing rapidly but so did its commitments, thus prompting air power advocates and their supporters to call for ever more groups. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, writing in the midst of the Korean War and the build up of forces in NATO, stated in a 1951 *Saturday Evening Post* article that the recent congressional decision to build up to 95 groups was inadequate and recommended 150 groups instead. In breaking this total down into specific missions he felt that America needed more air defense but then added, "of course, our most effective defense against this danger in the long view is a counter-offensive aimed at the centers of Soviet power."⁴⁶ He called for 62 groups for strategic forces as opposed to only 38 air defense groups.⁴⁶

Also in 1951, in a *Reader's Digest* article alluding to the new world-wide commitments, Spaatz pointed to obsolete aircraft in the Air Force inventory and claimed that the 95-group goal amounted to only the equivalent of 50 groups, which left the Air Force facing 10-1 odds. In his *Newsweek* column from the same period he called for an increase to at least the World War II level of 250 groups and stressed strategic bombing as the greatest need for growth. By early 1952 he had modified his prognosis and applauded Congress for endorsing the Joint Chiefs of Staff plan calling for 143 wings but then chided Congress for delaying implementation of the plan stating that it could lead to costly and perhaps fatal results.⁴⁷ At times air power advocates' calls for more groups even left them in conflict with the Air Force. In a June 1951 editorial, *Life* magazine sharply criticized Vandenberg for letting American air power slip behind the Soviets. Claiming to speak for the American people, the editors stated, “[Americans] not only want the best damn Air Force in the world, but they know that survival depends upon it,” and concluded, “To remain second best in the air, at this time, is to cease to exist as a nation.”⁴⁸

In their concern to maintain public support and present the best possible image of air power, though, air power advocates and Air Force supporters strove to glorify both approaches for defending against Soviet nuclear attack, but invariably they did so in ways that reinforced the image that America's best defense was a good offense. An example of this is Harold H. Martin's writings for *The Saturday Evening Post*. In November 1950 he wrote on air defense capabilities and while he found them to be sorely lacking, the two big culprits were the pre-Korean War budget limitations and the surprisingly early Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb. Nevertheless, according to Martin's depiction, the Air

Force was performing yeoman service in trying to catch up as quickly as possible: "When it became clear that we should need a strong network of defense, not in 1953 or '54, but immediately, the Air Force painfully squeezed out of its financial heart's blood \$50,000,000 with which to get the permanent installations started quickly." After painting a rosy picture of improvements in the near future, though, Martin reminded his audience that no defensive system could be perfect and that strategic bombing was still the nation's best defense: "Therefore, those men charged with providing the tactical air defense of the United States are among the strongest supporters of the Strategic Air Command. They know the forces of that command operating against the Soviet atomic force would provide our best defense against a mortal wound in the first few days of future war."⁴⁹

The next month Martin turned his attention to SAC. Comparing bomber crew teamwork to a baseball team executing a double-play and crewmember dedication to "novitiates studying for the priesthood," Martin presents a glowing depiction of SAC's capabilities to devastate the Soviet Union. He even made another contribution to the continuing legend of American precision bombing by extolling SAC's emphasis on "bull's-eye accuracy," which would take out Soviet industry but spare civilians. In all, Martin was convinced that SAC stood ready to defeat the Soviet Union in one massive atomic blitz, and in that he places America's greatest hope for survival. Of the prospects of a Soviet surprise nuclear attack Martin states that the greatest tragedy for America would be if such an attack caught SAC's bombers on the ground.⁵⁰

Other figures lauded the capabilities of America's air defense forces throughout the fifties. In 1951 *Life* magazine highlighted the gains made in air defense from its "pitiful

condition” of 1950, which the article blamed on “the Administration’s economies.” While the article wove an image of great proficiency, it also warned that “the Air Force cannot locally and specifically defend every U.S. city. This would swallow up more dollars than exist. Nor can the Air Force allow air defense to cut into its funds and facilities for air offense.”⁵¹ Another example is Milton Caniff, who placed the hero of his comic strip *Steve Canyon* in various plots involving air defense efforts and used these opportunities to showcase the Air Force and air defense efforts. In the fall of 1954, for example, Canyon foils communist saboteurs who are delaying an early-warning radar project, and in late 1954-early 1955 he temporarily assumes command of an Air Defense Command interceptor squadron. In this latter role Canyon and Colonel Davey, the temporarily out of commission squadron commander, discuss how important the air defense system is to America because, as Davey observes, “if Ivan tries a quarterback sneak it’s our job to stop as many of his bombers as we can, and alert our next line of defense!” Canyon, warning against complacency, states, “While we *sensible* people know [Soviet bombers] aren’t there *this* minute, but that they *could* be two minutes from now!” Even Caniff, though, stresses that air defense could only stop a fraction of the incoming Soviet bombers.⁵²

The advent of the Soviet nuclear threat was another challenge to the air power advocates’ emphasis on strategic bombing. The public clamor for air defense ensured that the Air Force, not unwillingly, would continue to strengthen defenses against air attack. But the air power advocates’ strategy of mixing reassuring images of potent air defense with often not too subtle warnings that no defense system could avert a national disaster and that true security could only be found in strong nuclear forces to deter such an attack

helped keep strategic bombing at the forefront of American air power. With this strategy air power advocates went a long way toward making the Strategic Air Command the preeminent symbol of security in American popular culture through much of the fifties.

IMPACT OF THE KOREAN WAR ON THE POPULAR CULTURE CAMPAIGN

While the nation was still debating air power's response to the Soviet atomic bomb, another Cold War shock came to the American public. On 25 June 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea, touching off the international phase of the Korean War. The American combat experience in that war pointed out the Air Force's weakness in tactical air power, which began yet another challenge to the air power advocates' devotion to the preeminence of strategic bombing. Many Air Force defenders blamed the weakness on inadequate force levels, but critics charged that the weakness actually stemmed from the Air Force's neglect of the tactical role in favor of their preferred strategic mission. Much that was said of the air power advocates' popular culture response to the air defense debate could be said of this controversy. While the Air Force tried to refute the charges, air power advocates set about depicting great tactical capabilities while stressing the preeminence of strategic bombing.

When critics claimed the Air Force neglected tactical air power, they generally meant close air support. The Air Force *did* have a long history of turning a blind eye to providing airborne firepower to troops in forward fighting positions. The lack of enthusiasm stemmed primarily from the airmen's conviction that it was the least productive means of inflicting damage on the enemy from the air, but close air support had

also gained a reputation as early as World War I as the deadliest mission of the whole air war.⁵³ While the Air Force claimed in the years leading up to Korea that it supported its commitment to provide the Army's tactical air power needs, the continued lack of enthusiasm is best seen in the difficulties working out joint doctrine with the Army and the fact that in 1948 the Air Force down-graded Tactical Air Command from a major command to a subordinate command within Continental Air Command. This latter move indicates another element of the close air support problem. What support for tactical air power there was in the Air Force generally saw it as an air superiority role which seemed closely related to air defense, so Air Defense Command and TAC were joined into one organization to facilitate cooperation between the two. With the Air Force's emphasis on strategic nuclear bombing few Air Force leaders envisioned a war that would pit large ground forces in prolonged combat. The difficulties in working out joint doctrine between the two services hurt close air support efforts early in Korea.⁵⁴

On the whole the Air Force provided effective close air support in Korea as Army leaders themselves were quick to point out. Major General William B. Kean, 25th Infantry Division commander, stated, "The close air support rendered by Fifth Air Force again saved this division as they have many times before." General Walton H. Walker, Eighth Army Commander, told a group of Air Force evaluators, "if it had not been for the air support that we received from the Fifth Air Force we would not have been able to stay in Korea."⁵⁵ Not everyone agreed, though, that the Air Force was doing all it could do. The Alsop brothers acknowledged that it was doing "superbly well with what it had," but they felt that the Air Force's emphasis on air superiority in Korea was ignoring the other

half of its tactical air responsibility. Others agreed, including some Army and Marine Corps officers, and enough complaints arose to prompt Congressional hearings in 1951 on Air Force ground support. Congress charged that air leaders were hypnotized by strategic bombing and air superiority and passed legislation that same year mandating that TAC retain major command status. The Air Force took various steps to rectify the situation, including establishing training programs in Seoul and Japan to train air and ground commanders in air-ground coordination and pressing for more tactical aircraft.⁵⁶

As with the air defense issue, though, air power advocates followed a popular culture “damage control” policy lest the sudden interest in tactical air power threaten the preeminence of strategic bombing. In his 1951 *Saturday Evening Post* article, Vandenberg claimed that those who sought to distinguish between strategic and tactical roles did not understand air power. Speaking of the three roles of strategic bombing, air defense, and support of surface forces, Vandenberg stated, “Although those three jobs seem pegged to different objectives, it is impossible to separate them in practice because - and this is a principle ignored too often - air power is indivisible. We don’t speak of a ‘strategic’ or a ‘tactical’ Army or Navy, yet those terms constantly are applied to the Air Force.” This statement introduced a complex argument that may have eluded many of his readers but it reinforced the image of revolutionary air power, for Vandenberg went on to say that every aircraft’s primary role was to “win the air battle on which final victory on land and sea is predicated.” While he talked about the importance of destroying enemy aircraft in the factory or in the air, his thinking about the best way to use air power to help front line troops was best revealed when he stated, “The same bomb that knocks out one mortar on

the battlefield can knock out a convoy of ten mortars fifty miles behind the front. Five hundred miles farther back that same bomb can blow up a railroad engine or a bridge, preventing the arrival of 100 mortars in the battle area.”⁵⁷

Air power advocates even connected the image of strategic bombing with that of air interdiction’s magnified benefits to the ground war. Harold H. Martin, in *The Saturday Evening Post*, described a B-29 bombing raid against North Korean rail lines carrying supplies to Communist forces. In describing the target’s significance Martin quotes the group’s commander during the preflight briefing:

Through it passes the main rail line from the north. It’s the eastern gateway to Korea from Russia and Manchuria. The tanks that have been playing the devil with our troops in South Korea came through...there. The munitions from the nitrate plant at Konan to the north pass through there. There’s an oil refinery there that keeps the tanks and the vehicles of the Reds on the move.... Between us, we’ll put about 800,000 pounds of TNT on a target that’s roughly 3000 feet long and 2000 feet wide. If we do our jobs right. That ought to be enough.

The author takes the reader through the mission in a style reminiscent of a World War II bombing mission. Rather than emphasizing bombers destroying the enemy’s industrial heart, though, Martin places the mission in the context of a massive Air Force - Navy interdiction campaign to save the U.N. position by starving the enemy of supplies.⁵⁸

A more colorful effort, literally and figuratively, came from a *Life* photo essay complete with aerial photos of a carpet of bomb bursts and a close-up of the risqué nose-art adorning a B-29. The target for this mission was the staging area for four divisions of North Korean troops massing for an attack on U.N. positions at Taegu. Again emphasizing images of scientific efficiency, a pictograph details the grid-like pattern the bombers used to ensure every bit of the staging area was covered, but the text indicates

that 850 tons of bombs were used. As in the previous example, this was not quite the “one bomb - 100 mortars” image that Vandenberg used, but it was stirring and, as the author relates, when the American G.I.s dug in across the river saw it they “stood up in their emplacements and cheered.” But to ensure that no one missed the larger meaning of this image, the author added, “The ‘wild blue yonder boys’ of the Air Force were forsaking their strategic bombing to give help to the beleaguered ground troops.”⁵⁹

Like the long-time image of strategic bombing created by air power advocates, Vandenberg’s image of air interdiction seemed inherently sensible and efficient. Why drop one bomb on one mortar when the same bomb could be used to knock out 10, or even 100? What Korean War air interdiction campaigns such as “Operation Strangle” were to prove, though, was that Vandenberg’s claims, common among most Air Force leaders, did not always hold true. Air interdiction racked up impressive tallies of trucks destroyed, rail lines cut, and bridges destroyed, and it frequently halted daylight movement of Communist forces and supplies, but the damage was quickly repaired and movement continued under cover of darkness. More important, Korean War experience showed that air interdiction could seriously impede efforts to mount or halt a major offensive, when the need for reinforcements and supplies was at its highest, but it was not effective enough to disrupt enemy firepower during periods of static warfare. Even during periods of heavy offensive action enough mortars would still find their way into enemy hands to do serious damage.⁶⁰ Thus front line troops constantly faced enemy mortars throughout the war. This limitation to air interdiction’s capabilities was far too complex, though, to be widely appreciated by the general public, so the images of air power efficiency still held sway.

Air power advocates also tried to counteract the criticism by showcasing Air Force close air support efforts. In the wake of the Inchon landing Spaatz gave Air Force close air support much of the credit for turning the tide of battle: “Day and night our planes bombed, strafed, observed, and harassed. The situation changed from despair and retreat to attack and annihilation.” And a month later he denied Army charges that the Air Force’s favored plane for close air support, the jet-powered F-80, was too fast for the job by extolling its ability to not only defend the troops but to defend itself against enemy aircraft.⁶¹ Perhaps the greatest effort, though, came when the Air Force turned to long-time air power advocate Howard Hughes and asked him to make a movie featuring Air Force close air support in action.⁶²

The film came out in 1952 as *One Minute to Zero*. Hughes turned to another air power advocate for one half of the screenwriting team, William Wister Haines, author of the novel *Command Decision*. The movie depicts the Army and Air Force working together closely and shows the Joint Operations Centers functioning smoothly as they receive requests for air support and expeditiously assign plentiful air assets to each mission. In one scene, for example, sixteen F-80s are dispatched to help one threatened company. Time after time throughout the movie the Air Force comes to the rescue of beleaguered ground troops. Army - Air Force cooperation is depicted as cordial, as in the friendship between the film’s star Robert Mitchum, playing an Army colonel, and an Air Force colonel played by William Talman. In one of the film’s dramatic highpoints, Mitchum leads a force deep into enemy territory so it can hold up an enemy truck convoy long enough for the Talman’s air forces to destroy it. The plan works, but Mitchum’s

forces are cut off and the Army can not relieve them till morning. Talman comes to the rescue with supplies and air support but is shot down and killed in the process. The movie bears no acknowledgment of military assistance. The Army refused to approve the final product because one scene, not in the original script, depicts an artillery unit shelling a group of refugees that had been infiltrated by enemy soldiers.⁶³

In a similar vein the Air Force supported a cinematic effort to highlight American tactical air power and fits the image of the fighter pilot into the image of revolutionary air power. The United Artist film *Sabre Jet*, starring Robert Stack, highlighted the F-86, the Air Force's frontline fighter, and used actual combat footage shot in Korea to capture an authentic flavor of the Air Force's effort to win air superiority and help the Army on the ground. As with later air power films, it also showcases the dedication of Air Force pilots as they deal with family problems generated by wives forced to wait in Japan while their husbands fly combat missions over Korea. The pilots, sensing the "higher calling" of what air power can do in the war, place the Air Force's needs above their wives' concerns, and the wives in turn realize the importance of air power and embrace their husbands' commitment. In one critical scene Stack's wife, an ambitious combat reporter, realizes that her need to support her squadron commander husband outweighs her career goals.⁶⁴

Air power advocates even turned the public concern over tactical capabilities to their own advantage. Since they never felt the Air Force was large enough to meet its many commitments they added tactical air power to their list of "dangerously" weak areas. Part of this effort focused on Korea. For example, some called for immediate action to reverse the inferiority of American jet fighters to the MiG-15. Fletcher Knebel, writing for

Look magazine, stated the disparity dramatically: “The fact is that the Communists can rub us out of the air there any month they want to do it,” and asked “What has happened to the American fighting plane that only eight years ago ruled the skies of the world?”

Knebel laid the blame on budgetary constraints that forced the Air Force to design the F-86 as an all-purpose aircraft intended to perform air superiority, air interdiction, and close air support missions. This meant that the much lighter MiG-15 could fly higher and faster, out climb, and out maneuver the F-86 in combat.⁶⁵

Most calls for greater tactical air power, though, focused on Europe and the larger war with the Soviets that might come. In fact, if anyone doubted that the air power advocates learned how to exploit the new public image of tactical air power, Francis Vivian Drake’s 1951 *Reader’s Digest* article would remove all doubt. Writing of the projected build-up of American ground forces in Europe, Drake claimed that they were going there with inadequate tactical air forces and asked, “*What does it take to convince the Administration that sending troops to Europe without air cover is an act of suicide?*” Pointing to Soviet air strength he claimed they had 10,000 aircraft for supporting ground forces alone but that American air strength was planned to peak out at only 3,000. Drake called on the administration to institute an aircraft building campaign to rival that of World War II so that American ground troops would be protected by a tactical air force that could seize air superiority over Europe. Spaatz had stressed many of the same points in an article, also in *Reader’s Digest*, three months earlier and claimed that American tactical air power would face 10-1 odds in Europe. Decrying what he called the “Wall-of-flesh” mentality driving America’s planning for European defenses, Spaatz stated that tactical air

operations had inflicted 47% of the casualties suffered by the Communist forces in Korea and predicted that American troops would face the same fate if they could not prevent the Soviets from seizing and exploiting air superiority. And like Drake, Spaatz called for a dramatically increased level of aircraft production.⁶⁶

Even though air power advocates made public bows to the importance of tactical air power, they still cautioned that strategic bombing must remain the main focus because it was still America's best defense. Spaatz, for example, in a 1950 *Newsweek* column, conceded that tactical air power was important to meet Cold War challenges like Korea, but then stressed that “[t]he B-36 and the atom bomb still constitute the military force preventing a full-scale world war and localizing the Korean conflict.” And in his 1951 *Reader's Digest* article calling for tactical forces to seize air superiority in Europe, Spaatz said that ground and tactical air forces should act merely as holding forces while strategic bombing won the war by bombing the Soviet homeland: “there is not the remotest chance that our ground forces can defeat the Russian Army by coming to grips with all its divisions. The Russian Army must be strangled by the bombing of the industries behind the troops.”⁶⁷ Similarly, in his *Saturday Evening Post* article Vandenberg stated that strategic bombing was the only thing deterring Soviet aggression, but if war did come with the Soviets strategic bombing was the best means of seizing air superiority and supporting ground troops because it destroyed planes and weapons at their source.⁶⁸

The public effort to bolster the image of strategic bombing extended to the cinema as well. In 1951 Beirne Lay, coauthor of *Twelve O'clock High*, collaborated with Paul Tibbets, Jr., the pilot of the aircraft that dropped the first atomic bomb, on the movie

Above and Beyond. The film did well at the box office. It ranked twenty-ninth among the year's top attractions and grossed two-and-a-half million dollars.⁶⁹ The Air Force may have played a role in instigating the film. At the start of the project Lay told Curtis LeMay that Brigadier General Sory Smith, director of Air Force Public Information, told Tibbets that "the Air Force thought it timely to have his story made and would cooperate with a motion picture production." The movie tells the story of Tibbets' efforts to prepare and train the 509th Composite Group for the task of dropping the atomic bombs on Japan. A principle sub-plot revolves around the extreme security surrounding the Manhattan Project and the activities of the 509th. Unable to tell his men or their families what they are training for, Tibbets is depicted as suffering under the strain of accusations from many, even his wife, that he is a martinet. While the film does not deal with the larger themes of strategic bombing doctrine or revolutionary air power, it does portray Tibbets and most of his men as heroic figures sacrificing for a greater good. This greater good is, of course, that the atomic bomb will end the war, and by extension, that in the postwar environment it will keep the peace.⁷⁰

Taken together, the total effect of the heightened public interest in all forms of air power, strategic bombing, air defense, and tactical roles, was that air power advocates picked up the cry for more air power of all forms while keeping strategic air power as the primary focus and urging it on the public as the nation's best means of security. Wesley Price, for example, compared American air power to the Soviet's air strength across the board in a 1952 *Saturday Evening Post* article and claimed there were glaring weaknesses in all areas that needed immediate action to reverse many years of failing to heed the air

power advocates' recommendations. While America could not afford to neglect air defense and tactical air power, though, Price reminded his audience that the nation with the best strategic bombers held the key to aerial supremacy and thus to ultimate victory.⁷¹ In effect the air power advocates appropriated two potential threats to the preeminence of strategic bombing in the public's eyes and not only used them to rally the public behind their quest for a larger Air Force, they also managed to keep popular imagination focused on strategic bombing. Thus the whole affair turned into a "win-win" situation for the air power advocates' agenda.

Much the same could be said of the whole period from the Revolt of the Admirals to the end of the Korean War. The three major threats to the air power advocates' notion of an air power revolution threatened to derail their effort to convert the public to their way of thinking about air power. The Revolt of the Admirals seemed another example of inter-service bickering, but the Air Force appeared the winner in the whole affair. The B-36 had been vindicated of corruption charges, and the Navy appeared hypocritical in trying to discredit a role it seemed to be seeking for itself. The Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb created widespread fears for the defense of North America and threatened to divert Air Force efforts into the air defense mission. By showcasing air defense capabilities, though, while continually reminding the public that the best defense was a good offense, the air power advocates retained the public's trust. How many actually put their faith in Vandenberg's image of victory through destroying the Soviet homeland faster than they could destroy America is impossible to say. Judging by images that predominated through

much of the fifties, though, it seems clear that most people put their faith in keeping the Soviets at bay through the threat of retaliation. In short, they looked to nuclear deterrence for salvation. The images raised by the Korean War were accommodated in like manner. By showing Americans that the Air Force could, with public support and enough aircraft, handle the tactical role while it provided air defense and nuclear deterrence, air power advocates retained control of the image of air power in the popular imagination and kept the American public solidly in the air power corner. The best indication of the air power advocates' success in defending their air power image is that shortly after the end of the Korean War a Gallup poll showed that public faith in air power as the most potent force in winning any future war jumped to an all-time high of 81%.⁷²

Understanding the shape and contours of air power's image as it was fixed in the public imagination by the end of the Korean War is important because that image would not face another serious challenge for several years. It remained until the late fifties almost exactly what it had become in the early fifties. Yet another indication of the air power advocates' success in maintaining and expanding popular support for their vision during the period of challenge to that vision is the dominance their preferred air power role enjoyed in popular culture following Korea. That dominant image was strategic nuclear bombing and it was embodied by the Strategic Air Command, SAC. So prevalent was that image that the commander of SAC, Curtis E. LeMay, became a virtual icon, an image larger than life who represented not only his command and the Air Force, but the whole notion of what revolutionary air power had come to mean to air power advocates and to most Americans.

1. See chapter 4.
2. For treatments of the Revolt of the Admirals see Jeffery G. Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight For Naval Aviation, 1945-1950* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1994), Michael T. Isenberg, *Shield of the Republic: The United States Navy in an Era of Cold War and Violent Peace* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), chapter seven; Moody, *Building A Strategic Air Force*, 300-07; and Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine*, 251-59.
3. Air Power League, *Peace Through Air Power*, 4.
4. Alexander P. de Seversky, "Navies are Finished," *The American Mercury* (February 1946): 135-43, quotes from 136 and 137 respectively.
5. William Bradford Huie, "The Backwardness of Navy Brass," *The American Mercury* (June 1946): 647-53.
6. William Bradford Huie, "Navy Brass Imperils Our Defense," *The American Mercury* (July 1948): 7-14; William Bradford Huie, "Shall We Abolish the Marine Corps?" *The American Mercury* (September 1948): 273-80; William Bradford Huie, "A Navy - Or An Air Force?" *Reader's Digest* (December 1948): 62-67.
7. Carl Spaatz, "If We Should Have to Fight Again," *Life* (5 July 1948): 35; Carl Spaatz, "Gen. Spaatz on Atomic Warfare," *Life* (16 August 1948): 94, 99.
8. Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals*, 197-200; Isenberg, *Shield of the Republic*, 146-47; Carl Spaatz, "Budgeting for Land-Sea-Air Power," *Newsweek* (10 January 1949): 24.
9. Alexander P. de Seversky, "Our Antiquated Defense Policy," *The American Mercury* (April 1949): 396-98.
10. William Bradford Huie, "Why We Must Have the World's Best Air Force," *Reader's Digest* (March 1949): 29, 31-32; William Bradford Huie, "The Struggle for American Air Power," *Reader's Digest* (April 1949): 1-6, 124-30, quote from 1.
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12. Stahlman, *The Strategic Bombing Myth*.
13. Fletcher Pratt, "The Case for the Aircraft Carrier," *Reader's Digest* (May 1949): 53, 55, 57-58; Francis V. Drake, "The Case for Land-Based Air Power," *Reader's Digest*

(May 1949): 59-66. The charges of bias were prompted by the fact that in the five-month period from December 1948 to April 1949 *Reader's Digest* ran three pro-air power articles, all by Huie.

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15. Richard Tregaskis, "We Need Carriers and the B-36," *Collier's* (8 October 1949): 16, 60-61.
16. Drake, "The Case for Land-Based Air Power," 61, 64-66.
17. Carl Spaatz, "Unify the Armed Forces," *Newsweek* (9 May 1949): 26.
18. Carl Spaatz, "Europe in Late Spring," *Newsweek* (30 May 1949): 35.
19. Carl Spaatz, "Why We Need the B-36," *Newsweek* (11 July 1949): 21; Carl Spaatz, "Our Diminishing Air Power," *Newsweek* (8 August 1949): 21. For a history of Air Force neglect of tactical air forces in late Forties and early Fifties see, Caroline Frieda Ziemke, "In the Shadow of the Giant: USAF Tactical Air Command in the Era of Strategic Bombing, 1945-1955" (Ph. D. Diss., Ohio State University, 1989).
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CHAPTER 7

THE HEYDAY OF SAC: THE HIGH POINT OF THE POPULAR CULTURE CRUSADE

As America emerged from the Korean War the fear of monolithic, imperialistic Communism was reaching a peak. McCarthyites charged that Communist subversion had infiltrated important segments of American society and the late war had confirmed to many that the Soviets were willing to use force to advance their goals. This "Red Scare" also heightened fears that the Soviets would like nothing better than to destroy the most powerful nation, America, standing between them and world domination. This fear led many to consider the prospects of a surprise nuclear attack on America to be a real threat. Through the popular culture campaign air power advocates had convinced many that the one factor deterring the Soviets from launching such an attack was the certainty of annihilation at the hands of American strategic nuclear bombardment. After the Korean War, though, the popular culture crusade shifted focus slightly. In keeping with the trend away from theoretical arguments and predictions to more institutional emphases air power advocates less often stressed the concept of strategic bombing and instead emphasized the institutional embodiment of America's long-range strategic bombing force, the Strategic Air Command. Furthermore, rather than focusing on the need for SAC and the efficacy of

strategic bombing, air power advocates sought to build public faith that SAC could deliver on the promise of strategic bombing.¹

Air power advocates also continued to extoll other applications of air power, such as air defense and tactical missions, and they sought to create an image of the Air Force as modern, efficient, and progressive. Articles appeared occasionally reminding the public that should a Soviet attack come America's air defense system stood ready with the most advanced systems and dedicated personnel. Other works showcased the heroism, superiority, and self-sacrifice of the fighter pilot. Some works even highlighted non-flying activities within the Air Force, such as research and development, and showcased future wonders that would keep the Air Force on the cutting-edge of high technology. There were occasional pieces bolstering the image of the air power revolution, but by and large the air power advocates relied on the foundation laid in the late forties and trusted that the public still saw air power as reshaping the world and society. There was little dissent within the air power community during this period, but when some did raise complaints, as in the 1945-1953 period they leveled their criticisms at someone other than the Air Force.

The main emphasis, though, was on glorifying SAC, bolstering its reputation, and seeing to its every need. Numerous magazine articles focused on the command's vigilance and stressed the fact that American bombers could be launched at a moment's notice. The coverage also extended to SAC's commander, Curtis E. LeMay, making the two virtually synonymous, even to the point of anthropomorphizing LeMay's gruff and tenacious reputation into the image of SAC. Perhaps the most notorious facet of the veneration of SAC, though, was the series of movies made specifically to showcase the command and its

needs. Collectively known as the “SAC trilogy” the movies illustrate the extent of the public fascination with America’s nuclear strike force.

An integral part of the SAC story in this period involves the defense policies of the Eisenhower administration. Shortly after becoming president in 1953 Dwight Eisenhower, career Army officer and commander of Allied forces in Europe during World War II, instituted a defense policy known as New Look, based on the strategy of Massive Retaliation. Seeking economic stability and security for what he called the “long haul,” Eisenhower’s New Look policies stressed deterrence, focused on harnessing technological innovations, and relied on allied ground forces to supplement American air and sea forces in the event of war. Since America enjoyed a considerable advantage over the Soviet Union in strategic nuclear forces, and since the prospect of matching the Soviets in ground forces promised to be massive and costly, the New Look policies made strategic bombing the cornerstone of America’s containment strategy.²

That air power would become the foundation of Eisenhower’s defense policy is not really surprising. Despite his long and prominent career with the Army, Eisenhower had demonstrated considerable acceptance of some of the tenets of revolutionary air power. In a 1947 speech at the Air Force Association Convention in Columbus, Ohio, he spoke at length about how aviation had transformed transportation and travel, and he claimed that the Polar Concept had reshaped international strategic relationships. More to the point, though, he stated that through vertical envelopment, what he called “aerial flanking,” air power had reshaped the tactical and strategic nature of warfare, and he called the Air Force “our nation’s best insurance against attack.” Furthermore, Spaatz had

stated in his *Newsweek* column that World War II had convinced Eisenhower of the need for the world's strongest Air Force and that since the war he had been a staunch advocate of air power in a preeminent position over the other services.³ This does not mean that Eisenhower was an air power convert, but he was sympathetic to it and his views on fiscal conservatism meshed with what air power advocates had been saying for decades: air power could provide better defense at less cost. In fact, the thinking behind New Look followed the same line of thinking at the heart of de Seversky's *Air Power: Key to Survival*. America could not match the Soviets in ground forces so it must rely on its technological and industrial superiority by focusing on air power.

The Eisenhower defense policies, therefore, institutionalized the faith air power advocates had been nurturing in American society for years. This official endorsement of revolutionary air power brought the Air Force into a dominant position within the defense establishment. That dominance is reflected in the Air Force receiving the lion's share of military budgets throughout much of the fifties and in the fact that during Eisenhower's tenure an Air Force officer, Nathan F. Twining, rose to the position of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the only time an Air Force officer has held that office.⁴ Since the reason for Air Force dominance was the strategic nuclear bombing role, the Strategic Air Command in turn dominated the Air Force. This led to a period often referred to as "The Hey Day of SAC," the "golden age" of strategic bombing in American military history.

There was more to SAC's dominance than just official policy, though, for SAC's dominance is also reflected in the popular culture of the period. The old cultural phenomenon of technological messianism that had led people to expect salvation from the

airplane, the long years of air power advocacy nurturing those expectations by promising deliverance through bombing, the fear of Communism all came together in one time period and Eisenhower's policies added only official sanctification. Many who believed went along willingly. Others, faced with the fears so much a part of the Cold War atmosphere of the fifties, desperately wanted to find assurances somewhere and they were easily lulled into trusting SAC by the pervasive images. Still others who might not quite believe went along because it was national policy and they were patriotic. A graphic example of the widespread faith in SAC can be seen in a 1958 advertisement run by Kelsey-Hayes, an aircraft and missile component manufacturer. In a tribute to SAC the ad shows a smiling boy lying in bed giving the "A-okay" sign to a formation of B-58 Hustlers flying past his window. In the background is superimposed the figure of an Air Force enlisted man and beneath the picture is the caption, "He awakes secure...thanks to 'SAC.'"⁵ Because of such images displayed prominently in popular culture during the fifties and into the sixties, culturally and officially, to paraphrase Henry Stimson, air power seemed to be the one true god, LeMay was its prophet, and the Strategic Air Command was the one true church.

SEMPER PARATUS: THE IMAGE OF SAC IN MAGAZINES

Magazines played a significant role in shaping the image of SAC in the fifties. Numerous articles appeared in nearly every major general interest magazine and they were nearly unanimous in the themes they stressed and the images they created. First, they were unwaveringly laudatory. There was no mistaking the editorial stand on the virtues of SAC in these articles. In fact, some of the claims made for or about SAC by such air

power advocates as Francis Vivian Drake and Harold H. Martin are so exaggerated they rival some of the more extreme claims made for air power in the late forties. Secondly, they dwelled at length on SAC's eternal vigilance. Another standard theme was the competence, professionalism, and dedication of SAC's personnel. Related to this theme were the constant reminders of the sacrifices SAC crewmembers made to be ready to fulfill their mission at a moment's notice. But the most important theme echoed old strains of technological messianism and raised expectations of salvation through air power to its highest and most overt expression. Deliverance was no longer just a vague promise based on eschatological imagery, systematic theories, or brutal predictions. Now it had a name, and that name was SAC. It even had a face, and that face was Curtis E. LeMay's. When air power advocates sought to shape SAC's image as the public's salvation in the nuclear age the general interest magazines carried the bulk of the burden. Other media, especially film, might put the message in more vivid or memorable images, but the steady flow of magazine articles ensured that the public got numerous and frequent reminders that their faith must remain in nuclear air power.

The showcasing of SAC in America's general interest magazines began before the end of the Korean War. At the end of 1950 Harold H. Martin's *Saturday Evening Post* article provided one of the first close-up examinations of SAC in the popular culture campaign. In a portent of future magazine coverage, Martin's depiction is celebratory almost to the point of being a paean. For example, the caption under a picture of a B-36 reads, "The big atom-bombers are kept in top condition by ceaseless attention to

maintenance." Of the significance of SAC's forces Martin states, "this country's ability to survive a war with Russia depends upon SAC's being constantly ready to move out fast and hit hard as soon as the whistle blows."⁶ In extolling the crews, Martin stresses how much more demanding, physically and mentally, atomic bombing is than World War II bombing: "The slightest sign of stupidity, sloppiness, carelessness, indecision or confusion under stress is marked down on a check list, and a voluminous report is made which evaluates not only the proficiency of each member of the crew but the effectiveness of the whole crew." Many World War II bombing veterans, according to Martin, had to be eliminated. With public memories of wartime bombing heightened by such recent movies as *Twelve O'clock High* and *Command Decision*, this must have been powerful imagery. Martin also combines the traditions of Douhet and the ACTS by extolling both the precision of the crews' bombing and the tremendous destructive capacity they deliver. The crewmembers wield greater force than "all the power for destruction possessed by all the armies of the world, from the time of Alexander of Macedon to the present," but their "swift, sure precision" and "drill-ground precision" leads to "bull's-eye accuracy."⁷

In 1951 *Life* ran a pictorial essay on SAC, calling it, "the very essence of airpower." *Life* barely mentioned the ongoing war and debates about air power roles, focusing instead on what would become standard features of SAC articles. The description of the average base emphasized security, as when a photo caption states, "SAC cooks, like all other personnel at Barksdale Field, ...carry arms and ammunition when on duty or marching to work." The bombers were extremely complex and demanding when it came to maintenance and flying, but their range and ability to reach

their targets were touted in great detail. The aircrews were highly trained and dedicated, but the sacrifices they made to remain combat ready received considerable attention as well. The article even melded the twin traditions of strategic bombing into its overall image of SAC capability for it lauded both the destructive capabilities of the bombs SAC planes carried and the exacting precision with which the crews delivered them.⁸

The emphasis on SAC increased after the Korean War, and one of the earliest postwar articles came from Francis Vivian Drake in a *Reader's Digest* article published only two months after the war ended. Drake makes clear the overall significance of SAC at the outset: "The free world may well stand hat in hand before our superbly trained atom-bomber crews.... They stand guard for all of us 24 hours a day, 365 days a year." He also highlights SAC's concern for constant readiness by detailing the reaction to a headquarters security team's attempt to sneak onto a SAC base in what appears to be a stricken airliner. The description of crewmembers and the demands they face presents a harrowing image: "Never has so much been demanded, both physical and intellectual, of fighting men in peacetime.... They are forever on a basis of war.... Graying hair and nervous exhaustion are common among them."⁹ The description of a training flight, said to be conducted under realistic combat conditions, is filled with a tense excitement: "'Air Force jet 123, cleared for takeoff!' The tension in the cockpit tightens like a fiddlestring.... 'Air Force jet 123, rolling!' 'Clear!'" Disaster seems to lurk at every turn throughout the flight, and every action requires the most exacting precision.¹⁰

The mood of the text is quite frankly melodramatic, but this is because Drake sees the threat as immediate and America's response to it as "reckless." Pointing to the larger

Soviet air force, which he claims could maintain a continuous bombardment of the United States, Drake states that SAC funding allows only one crew per bomber and that the crews are so exhausted after every flight that they must be grounded for four days. The solution, for Drake, is more money for SAC so that it can increase its manning to two crews per aircraft. But he does not advocate a larger defense budget. Claiming that SAC gets only \$5.50 out of every one hundred defense dollars, he calls for increasing SAC's share by taking existing money from other forces, "that, no matter how courageous, could not head off atomic aggression."¹¹

The next year *Life*, in a lengthy piece detailing the many wonders of the "Jet Age," focused much of the article on the men and planes of SAC. The tone of the article mixes images of nuclear destructive capabilities with cutting-edge high technology advances being made in the Air Force. Modern aircraft, epitomized by the nuclear bomber B-47, are characterized as so advanced that it takes a new breed of man to fly them. Describing the B-47 as the backbone of SAC, and its crews as "[t]he foremost representatives of the jet age," the article details the B-47 mission profile and flight regimen as so stressful that crews must be "psychologically decompressed to bring them gently down to a slower tempo," and so physically demanding that they need a massage and steam room to "relax by sweating out their physical fatigue." Crewmembers who can withstand such pressures are so critical to the nation's defenses that, as the article quotes one senior Air Force officer: "When we lose one of them it's like losing the battleship *Missouri*."¹²

A unique chapter in the SAC literature came in 1955 from Arthur Godfrey. In the concluding installment of an eight-part autobiography published in *Saturday Evening Post*

Godfrey explained that his crusade for air power was the sole reason he remained active in broadcasting. Devoting almost the entire article to his cause, he explained why he thought America needed more air power and why the only acceptable air power was the nuclear air power of SAC. "Guided missiles, radar screens and fighter planes are no substitute for long-range bombers." Unlike most other SAC articles, this one does not purport to be a factual exposé written by a professional journalist. There are no visits to SAC bases, no descriptions of heroic SAC pilots, no flights on the most advanced bombers, just one man's opinion and he delivers that opinion with all the certainty of a zealot. What makes this article noteworthy is the author's notoriety. As one of the most popular figures in America entertainment Godfrey's name was sure to draw millions of readers to his words. Furthermore, Godfrey details his long association with the military and aviation, as well as his close friendship with LeMay, all of which was bound to lead many readers to think he knew what he was talking about. Godfrey's reasoning was simplistic, but it was straight forward. The Soviets were a threat and they were building a massive bomber fleet. Since air defense had never turned back a World War II bomber force the only thing that could save America was deterrence by having a bigger bomber fleet. Such a simplistic approach to an intractable but frightening problem was bound to appeal to many.¹³

In 1957 James Michener contributed a book-length feature, published in *Reader's Digest*, to the growing body of SAC literature. Michener was not an air power advocate. He had served in the Navy in World War II, and in 1953 he wrote *The Bridges at Toko Ri*, a best-selling novel showcasing Korean War naval aviation. According to the biographical sketch accompanying the article, though, he wrote it in response to the 1956 Soviet

invasion of Hungary as a testament to his belief that America was safe from Communist aggression. He wanted to tell the public about SAC, and in doing so he stresses many of the standard themes found in other SAC articles. Two events that Michener highlights, the response of a SAC base to a no-notice inspection and the annual SAC bombing and navigation competition, provide the suitable backdrop for showcasing SAC's capabilities. The dedicated people of Loring Air Force Base work round the clock to bring their base through the inspection with flying colors. The description of the bombing competition stresses not only the technical sophistication of the ground and air crews, but also the continuing legacy of American bombing accuracy. After downplaying the legend of "pickle barrel bombing" Michener adds, "Many planes laid their bombs practically on target. And a few did actually 'hit the pickle barrel' scoring what is called a 'shack.'"¹⁴

While Michener's account stresses many of the standard themes, though, he adds a human touch as well. Looking at SAC "from the bottom up," Michener makes enlisted members and the wives of SAC the heroes of his story. His testimony to the importance of SAC to America, for example, comes from the mouth of a B-52 maintenance master sergeant's wife. When interviewed by Michener in the midst of a civilian evacuation of the base she tells him, "We're at war, Mr. Michener, at war to prevent war. The rest of the nation doesn't know it, but we are."¹⁵ He follows a similar approach in describing the sacrifices made by the men who keep SAC running. He refers to SAC headquarters as "Ulcer Heaven," and states that most ground and flight crews either are underweight, or have ulcers, piles, or back problems. He even points to an "appalling" divorce rate in SAC

before 1950 as further proof of the price its personnel pay to protect America, and details the steps SAC took to turn the divorce rate around as proof of SAC's competence.¹⁶

The post-sputnik fears of Soviet missile attack brought another dimension to the SAC image. Writing for *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1958, Clay Blair reassured the public that SAC's retaliatory force would not be caught on the ground by a surprise missile barrage. In response to the Soviet missile threat SAC instituted plans to keep one third of their force in a combat configuration ready to takeoff in less than fifteen minutes and Blair, assessing these plans, states, "they do the job efficiently and effectively." In fact, Blair's depiction of SAC's bombers make them appear far more capable and flexible than ICBMs. But while Blair foresees imminent defenses against inbound Soviet missiles he extolls the B-52's ability to defeat enemy radar and evade fighters, and states, "even in the missile age most of the bombers will get through to target and back again." And in detailing future bomber advances planned by SAC, Blair falls into the pattern of excessive hyperbole. The B-70 is described as "breath-taking," "an awesome weapon system," and "comparable to developing an automobile that could cross the United States on one tank of gas." Its inertial navigation system will "automatically steer the B-70 unerringly to any point on the globe," and tests with it "have been chalking up amazing results."¹⁷

Later that same year Philip Gustafson, also writing for *The Saturday Evening Post*, detailed "SAC's new pattern of readiness to strike back from world-wide bases so widely dispersed that no attack known today could knock them all out at once." Visiting a B-47 base in Zaragoza Spain, Gustafson provides a look at SAC forces maintaining nuclear alert at dozens of overseas bases around the world. This side of SAC, as it appears in this

article, differs little from that seen in other treatments. Their mission is just as vital to American security, according to Gustafson. He quotes one flier, who states, "My wife is always asking me why I have to sacrifice myself to save the world when all our friends lead nice normal family lives." Gustafson then provides his own answer, "I believe that most of these fellows feel there's an important job to be done for the free world. And we're all pretty lucky that they do."¹⁸ The crewmembers all appear larger than life. Gustafson describes one as "a deeply tanned, dark-haired gunboat of a guy.... one of the most competent pros in SAC, where you have to be good just to stick," "a dedicated Air Force man," "hard as nails," but still "a devoted family man." Readiness in the face of the new missile threat is also given effusive, and at times theatrical praise: "I sleep in my underwear, with the flight suit laid out in such a way that I can step into suit and shoes in a single leap," "Everything about the area exudes an air of readiness, even the autos are cocked, not parked," and "the pack exploded out of the building.... we shot out on the acres of concrete apron and, veering fit to tip over, the jeep screeched to a halt...and everybody hit the concrete."¹⁹

The glorification of SAC continued into the early sixties. For example, in 1961 *Life* ran a pictorial essay focusing on how Loring Air Force Base responded to yet another inspection. The inspection gave the *Life* writers ample opportunity to present a reassuring picture of SAC's capabilities and professional excellence. Ever vigilant, SAC uses these inspections, "the severest going-over the Strategic Air Command gives its units," to ensure that every base is ready to do its part for security through nuclear retaliation. *Life* calls the one that hit Loring, "the surprise test that helps keep SAC unrelentingly ready." The

inspector general appears grim and determined in every photo, and his staff is described as “hard-eyed officers with a bagful of tricks to play.” The base whips into action and earns high praise from *Life*: “Crews worked with fierce, cold efficiency to get ready for their far-ranging missions. Even the watchdogs snarled more menacingly.” The legend of American bombing accuracy gets another boost in this article as well, for the inspectors found that in the bombing phase of the inspection the target “was hit on the nose every time.” *Life*’s overall assessment: “SAC is more than ever on alert.”²⁰

The series of magazine articles throughout the fifties also extolled other aspects of SAC besides its bombers. More than just rounding out the picture to include all activities in SAC, these other articles, sharing the same laudatory tone, created a comprehensive picture that whatever SAC did it could do no wrong. In 1955, for example, John G. Hubbell wrote an article for *Reader’s Digest* describing the survival school SAC ran for its flight crews. The school taught fliers how to survive in any climate on earth should they be forced to crash-land or bail out of a stricken aircraft. Predictably, Hubbell’s tenor celebrates both how comprehensively SAC is prepared for any contingency and how much SAC flight crews suffer to defend America.²¹ Another article by Hubbell in 1957 introduced the public to the new SAC air refueling tanker, the KC-135. This new all-jet swept wing aircraft was a vital addition to the SAC inventory, according to Hubbell, because it allowed bombers to refuel at their normal cruise altitude and airspeed. The new capability made the range-extending operation more reliable and efficient and, Hubbell told his audience, ensured the bombers would reach their targets deep inside the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that by this time air refueling had become routine, Hubbell managed to

convey a sense of urgency as yet again the brave, dedicated, professionals of SAC demonstrate that “new power has been added to the free world’s biggest Sunday punch - the Strategic Air Command.”²²

The biggest addition to SAC during the fifties, though, was missiles, and despite Blair’s dismissive attitude toward them, air power advocates incorporated this new capability into the image of an all-powerful SAC. Two notable figures in presenting this development were Corey Ford and James Perkins. In August 1958 the two writers collaborated on an article in *Reader’s Digest* glorifying the men and mission of SAC’s B-47 bases in Spain,²³ and that same month they contributed an article in *The Saturday Evening Post* telling the story of the commander of SAC’s First Missile Division, Major General David Wade. The tone of the article is virtually indistinguishable from the SAC articles focusing on bombers. The authors say of Wade and the importance of his mission, “There’s no second place in a nuclear war...he doesn’t propose to see this country runner-up to any power on earth.” On the skill demanded of the new missileers the authors quote Wade, “the slightest error in calculation, the least lapse in split-second timing, can spell failure,” and again, “handling these complex devices executes heavier demands than any other weapons system in history.” When asked where he finds such superb people, Wade responds: “Any good SAC man.” All of this, the authors state, will change SAC from “an all-bomber force to a modern bomber-missile force capable of reaching and destroying any enemy aggressor on the globe.”²⁴

Ford and Perkins return to the subject of SAC’s ICBMs in 1960 with an article in *Reader’s Digest* describing the test launch of an Atlas missile. The authors describe the

missile with awe-inspiring hyperbole, “deadliest weapon of the free world” and “engines that deliver 7,500,000 horsepower - enough power to light four cities the size of Los Angeles,” yet they include images of frightful destructiveness, “it looks like a prehistoric monster impatient to ravage the earth.” The crews that service and launch the missile are also depicted with a certain amount of overstatement, “[they] spend long hours learning to work together with perfect precision.” But the overall impression conveyed by the authors, that this awesome weapon is part of America’s best hope for security, is best illustrated in their quote from the missileers’ squadron commander: “We are not men of war. We’re men of peace, making our contribution toward preventing another world war. But we’re proud to know that if an aggressor ever forces war on this country our Atlases are ready.” With the question of the “missile gap” dominating the contemporary political debate, the authors even manage to include a subtle reminder that SAC’s missile program is not getting enough funding. After the launch a key member of the launch team goes home to his barracks room and writes to his wife and the authors convey his sad news that she still cannot join him because “Congress hasn’t appropriated funds for enough quarters on the base...and rents in the area have skyrocketed.”²⁵

A personal reflection of the magazines’ fixation with SAC was the concurrent attention focused on its long-time commander, Curtis E. LeMay. As commander of SAC from 1948 to 1957 LeMay became the personification of not just the command but strategic bombing as well. His personal characteristics fitted him well as a role model for the image the Air Force, air power advocates, and America’s leadership wished to shape for their nuclear deterrence forces. Gruff and taciturn by nature, LeMay was a forceful

commander who believed strongly in strategic bombing, but Bell's Palsy had also left his face mildly disfigured into what appeared to be a perpetual scowl.²⁶ When LeMay took over SAC he found it to be, as Harry Borowski has described, "a hollow threat," but he quickly turned the command around.²⁷ He soon gained a reputation as a tough, demanding commander who drove SAC's people hard to meet his exacting standards. Many of the articles highlighting SAC throughout the fifties focused on LeMay as the person singlehandedly responsible for SAC's effectiveness and often seem to imply that he personally invested the command with the same toughness and determination that he himself was reported to possess.²⁸ The greatest reflection of the emphasis on LeMay, though, is the articles which focused solely on the man himself.

In 1950 William Bradford Huie wrote his last air power piece, a profile of LeMay, for *Coronet*. Compared to Huie's articles of the previous year this one was low-key and centered on LeMay's personality, his qualifications to lead SAC, and his commitment to its mission. Calling SAC "the cocked arm of Western civilization," Huie personalized that mission into LeMay's mission: "LeMay's job is to keep the arm ready and strong, for on his ability to strike hard hangs our principal hope for survival." Describing LeMay as "a relentless efficiency expert," Huie also claims that his reputation as "more machine than man" is unfair, and that his concern for SAC's troops, as seen in his efforts to improve Air Force housing, inspires great loyalty. Still, Huie does not mince words when it comes to LeMay's demands on his people. Speaking of LeMay's staff he quotes LeMay: "They know I wouldn't hesitate to order them on a one-way mission if I thought it was necessary." And in summing up the profile he gives LeMay the last word: "They say I'm

pretty tough. Maybe I am. Right now it's a tough world we live in. This command has to operate just like we did in England or on Guam during the war.”²⁹

A similar profile appeared in *Life* in 1954 written by Ernest Havemann. The article received an even wider audience when it was reprinted that same year in *Reader's Digest*. Calling LeMay “relentlessly efficient,” an “implacable perfectionist,” and “the toughest air soldier the world has ever known,” Havemann says “LeMay and the Air Force seem to have been made for each other” and that he “is ideally suited by reputation and demeanor to keep his command at the peak efficiency which world conditions and U.S. military policy demand.”³⁰ But it is in describing LeMay’s personal impact on SAC and military history that Havemann’s heroic hyperbole reaches its peak. LeMay is credited as the single agent that made SAC a force that the Russians feared and respected. In describing LeMay’s impact on SAC Havemann states, “LeMay took SAC by the scruff of the neck, gave it one quick shake and soon had it bristling.” Speaking of LeMay’s development of the firebombing tactics used against Japan, Havemann calls it “one of the crucial military decisions of all time, a decision that will certainly go down in history alongside such fortunate tactical choices as Washington’s counterattack at Trenton.” It is this reputation as much as American bombers that in Havemann’s opinion deters Soviet aggression.³¹

The interest in LeMay was so great that it even spawned articles detailing LeMay’s private life and the interest continued when he moved up to Chief of Staff of the Air Force in 1957. In that year, for example, LeMay joined Arthur Godfrey on an African safari that was filmed for Godfrey’s television show, and *Life* covered the event in their magazine.³² *Life* again related LeMay’s off-duty activities in 1961. His toughness was highlighted by

describing his penchant for judo and photographing him in action. His perfectionism came through various other interests, such as building radios, tying his own fishing flies, and loading his own shotgun ammunition. But the article also revealed a softer side of the head of the Air Force. He is shown training his pet dog and playing an organ, and both activities are described as avid interests.³³

General interest magazines occasionally showcased other Air Force leaders, such as Nathan Twining and Thomas S. Power, but the coverage was not as extensive as that given to LeMay, for it seems that no other air leader sparked the public's interest as much as did LeMay.³⁴ He was certainly a colorful character who gave magazine writers plenty of material to work with when writing their stories, and judging by his encouragement of Lay and Bartlett in their movie ventures, it is clear that LeMay courted public support for SAC through popular culture. It seems, though, that there was something more driving the public fascination with LeMay, that it was a two-way proposition. Magazine editors and air power advocates seem to have sensed that, having put its faith in strategic nuclear bombing, the public needed a single person, a face, to associate with the image of strategic air power, one that would reassure the public that SAC could deliver on the promises of security through air power. Whether the one person at the head of SAC through most of the fifties actually fit the image of strategic bombing built up over several decades, or the LeMay mystique was a media creation is hard to say. Either way, he became the embodiment of strategic bombing and many saw SAC as a reflection of LeMay.

The glowing, theatrical, often celebratory tones of the general interest magazines in their treatment of SAC during the 1950s is perhaps the most controversial aspect of the phenomenon. Such a tone is not surprising coming from noted air power advocates like Francis Vivian Drake, but when it is adopted by staff writers, such as those at *Life*, it shows how deeply the faith in air power generally, and strategic bombing particularly, had penetrated in some circles. Granted such laudatory and melodramatic tones were products of the nature of the magazines' genre, for they were primarily forms of entertainment and thus had to keep their material light and action-packed. They did not bear the burden of investigative journalism or impartial judgment that magazines such as *Time* or *Newsweek* bore. Still, Hubbell's reference to nuclear war as a "Sunday Punch" trivializes a subject that would certainly spell unmitigated disaster for the entire world and helped create reassuring images of nuclear warfare that helped make it thinkable. And building up the leaders and followers of America's nuclear forces as larger-than-life heroes contributed to the technological messianism that prompted society to look to the bomber for salvation.

A FEW GOOD MEN: THE IMAGE OF SAC IN MOVIES

The air power advocates continued to advance their popular culture crusade through the medium of motion pictures after the Korean War, and like their efforts in general interest magazines many of the films showcased the Strategic Air Command. The air power movies of the post-World War II era are unique in that most try to convey a message intended to shape the viewers' attitudes toward air power. While such interwar movies as *Wings* and *Hell's Angels* were consciously designed to glamorize air power,

their message was limited to inspiration and did not try to plant an overt agenda.³⁵ This changed with the postwar air power advocates' notion of revolutionary air power, for they saw the cinema as a perfect vehicle to advance the revolution. The high point came with *Twelve O'clock High* and *Command Decision*, for subsequent films would rarely achieve the power and drama of these earlier movies in conveying their own messages, but the later movies advanced an agenda nonetheless. Perhaps most later films lacked the force of the two earlier ones because they differ from them in another manner. Revolutionary air power is inherent in the message of *Twelve O'clock High* and *Command Decision*: if strategic bombing is defeated, either in the skies over Europe or in the halls of power at home, the war is lost.³⁶ But later films stressed revolutionary images less and less as time went on. *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell*, released in 1955, projects the revolutionary image of air power to a point approaching the earlier classics, but that image is woven into the main plot rather than standing alone as the main theme. The overt messages of other prominent films of this period, *Strategic Air Command*, *Bombers B-52*, and *A Gathering of Eagles*, focus instead on themes calculated to boost recruitment and retention and stressed revolutionary images less with each succeeding film. By the third installment of this "SAC trilogy," revolutionary images appear hardly at all. Still, all three movies conveyed one important air power image quite forcefully: they reassured the public that the dedicated people of SAC could handle the enormous job of saving America from the threat of nuclear war.

The principle theme of *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell* is the redemption of its central character, but there is also an underlying theme running throughout the film that

stresses the revolutionary nature of air power glimpsed by Mitchell.³⁷ Usually this theme is a subtle but integral part of the main theme that Mitchell had been wrongly persecuted. Part of the theme justifying Mitchell's actions is that Army and Navy mismanagement of air power led to needless deaths. But an inescapable part of that theme is the image that Mitchell had foreseen the air power revolution and that if the Army and Navy had listened to him instead of breaking him America would have been much better prepared for World War II. The best example of this is when the Army's prosecutor ridicules Mitchell on the witness stand for claiming that Pearl Harbor's defenses were dangerously weak and mismanaged and for predicting that the Japanese could attack Pearl Harbor with a carrier-borne attack force.³⁸

Also implicit in the film's message is that America in the 1950s has seen the light, that it recognizes Mitchell's vision and has put its faith in revolutionary air power. The film did reasonably well at the box office, it ended the year as twenty-eight on the list of top money makers grossing \$3 million, so millions saw its congratulatory message that all intelligent people knew Mitchell had been right all along.³⁹ Throughout the prosecutor's attack on Mitchell's predictions the audience of the 1950s was expected to recognize that history had "proven" Mitchell right, and in the context of the fifties they were expected to pay particular heed to another prediction Mitchell makes in the movie. In one scene he tries to convince a general, who later heads the panel of judges at his court martial, of the effectiveness of bombing and tells him, "One of these days half the world will be in ruins from the air. I want this country to be in the other half." The general had not listened, but America was reassured that Mitchell's words had been finally heeded. As Mitchell walks

out of his hotel after the court martial he looks up at a formation of biplanes that suddenly turns into waves of jets streaking across the screen to the strains of the Air Force Song.

Another movie from 1955, *Strategic Air Command*, presents the same reassuring theme, but the image of revolutionary air power is more understated. The film began as an idea Jimmy Stewart expressed to his friend, screenwriter Beirne Lay. Both had been B-24 pilots in World War II and both were still in the Air Force Reserve. Stewart suggested a movie about a reservist recalled to active duty during the Korean War. Lay had written a movie script about B-36s called *High Ramparts* that was never produced, so he took Stewart's idea, combined it with elements from *High Ramparts*, and developed them into the story for *Strategic Air Command*.⁴⁰ Darryl F. Zanuck at Twentieth Century-Fox briefly considered the project but ultimately declined and Paramount bought the story assigning Samuel J. Briskin to produce the film and Anthony Mann to direct it. Lay co-authored the screenplay with Valentine Davies, who had written *The Bridges at Toko Ri* and who had a brother in the Air Force and a son in the Air Force Reserve.⁴¹

The plot revolves around a famous baseball player, Dutch Holland, played by Stewart, who is recalled to active duty as a Reserve bomber pilot. With his ballplaying career just beginning to recover from his service in World War II, Holland at first resents having to interrupt it again, but he soon begins to see that SAC desperately needs reservists to remain on active duty beyond their involuntary tour of duty. His newlywed wife, on the other hand, is anxious to return to her settled civilian lifestyle. Holland finally resolves to remain on active duty because SAC's mission is so important that it outweighs all personal considerations. Significantly, his wife, played by June Allyson, reconciles

herself to Holland's decision because she too can see how important his new job is. The issue of reservists staying on active duty was a great concern to Lay, who told LeMay that he felt SAC would be dependent upon reservists for 80% of their personnel for a long time and that he hoped the movie would inspire more of them to reenlist.⁴²

In the process of explaining why Holland must stay in the Air Force the movie repeatedly stresses why SAC is so important to the nation. It is in this vein that images of revolutionary air power appear, because SAC and its strategic bombing role are depicted as the only force standing between America and war. When Major General Castle, 8th Air Force Commander, tells Holland he is being recalled, Castle tells Holland, "Look, do you realize that we're the only thing that's keeping the peace? By staying combat ready we prevent a war?" Holland is still unconvinced and bitter until on a flight a long-service sergeant tells Holland, "Every day in SAC's a war, Colonel. Pressure's on all the time and General Hawks is breathing down your neck. We never know when the other fellow may start something so we've got to be combat ready 24 hours a day, seven days a week." This gets Holland thinking, and the course of subsequent events convinces him that he must stay in because, as he explains to his wife, "But there is a kind of war on. You've got to stay ready to fight without fighting. That's why I made this decision." With such repetitious emphasis of the same theme and the contemporary worries about nuclear war, the audience could hardly miss the point that, according to those who made the movie, the only thing standing between them and a Soviet nuclear attack was air power in the form of strategic nuclear bombing.⁴³

The film also reinforces standard motifs that were part of the revolutionary image of air power. The global reach of strategic bombing is emphasized when Holland's wife does not believe that he could fly from Texas to Alaska and back without stopping, and when Holland's squadron flies the new B-47 non-stop from Florida to Japan. Both traditions of strategic bombing also find their way into the movie. Twice the destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons, the Douhet tradition, is showcased. In the first instance Holland tells his wife that one B-36 with one atomic bomb could do the job of a thousand World War II bombers. Later, Hawks, a thinly-disguised representation of LeMay, tells a group of B-47 crewmembers, "One B-47 and a crew of three carries the destructive power of the entire B-29 force we used against Japan." But the one bomb run scene emphasizes the continuing legacy of the ACTS tradition. Bombing from 43,000 feet, Holland's B-47 crew scores a "shack," Air Force parlance for a hit less than ten feet from the target. The film even includes a scene that exhibits the mystical faith that was often a feature of the air power advocates' message. When Holland first sees the B-47 the background music becomes haunting and ethereal while Holland, in awe, murmurs, "well, she's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life, General. Well, just look at her...look at her."

The Air Force was involved both officially and unofficially in the making of *Strategic Air Command*. Lay consulted often with LeMay on the project from its earliest formative stages through post-production problems seeking LeMay's feedback and help on numerous issues. LeMay encouraged Lay in his focus on Reserve manning problems, noting that such forces "must be in being and ready to go when the whistle blows if we are to adequately defend the country in the atomic age." LeMay also arranged for declassified

SAC briefings for Mann and Davies during the early production stages and even pressed the studio to push up the film's release date.⁴⁴ The Air Force provided technical support for the film, which gave them the right to recommend script changes, but all their reservations were minor, and as with other air power films did not alter the basic plot or message. The main Air Force concern was that Generals Castle and Hawks appear to be heavy-handed and indifferent to the turmoil Air Force needs create in reservists' lives, the very thing that most reservists feared and resented in their active duty tours. This concern prompted revisions in the final script, most notably in the final scene where Hawks reveals his concern for reservists' hardships and repeats the message that grave national needs demand such sacrifices. The Air Force also requested changes in the depiction of Air Force members' alcohol consumption and minor inflight procedures, all of which were accommodated in the final film.⁴⁵

The film was a big success at the box office and many air power advocates helped support and advertise it. The Air Force Association encouraged Lay from the outset, sponsored the film's premieres in New York City and Washington, D.C., and presented Stewart with a special medal. The American Legion also helped with the New York City premiere, and Arthur Godfrey televised it on his show and interviewed many of those attending. The film ranked as the seventh highest moneymaker that year, and Spencer Weart points out that more people saw it than any other film on nuclear war subjects.⁴⁶

The third major air power film of this period, *Bombers B-52*, released in 1957, also focused on one of SAC's personnel problems, that of retaining experienced crew chiefs. Like *Strategic Air Command*, this movie also uses the issue of SAC's readiness to defend

America as the compelling reason why people should forego greater money-making opportunities and an easier life as civilians. The plot revolves around a senior crew chief, Master Sergeant Chuck Brennan played by Karl Malden, who has spent twenty years in the Air Force but who's daughter urges him to retire and take a lucrative executive position in an aircraft manufacturing plant near San Francisco. Adding to the tension is the fact that Brennan's daughter, Lois played by Natalie Wood, thinks her father's position lacks respect, and that Lois begins dating an officer Brennan regards as an irresponsible playboy but who happens to be Brennan's squadron commander. A major sub-plot is that Brennan's proposed retirement comes just as his wing is slated to be the first to convert from B-47s to the brand-new B-52. Without experienced crew chiefs like Brennan, the audience is told, the mighty B-52 is worthless because it will never get off the ground.

The movie went through several name changes during its gestation period, but through it all Beirne Lay, though not mentioned in the credits, played a major role. In March 1955 Jack Warner, a long-time friend of Hap Arnold and a member of the Board of Directors of the Air Force Association, wrote to LeMay explaining that he had hired Lay to work on the film, then known as *Toward the Unknown*. Warner asked LeMay to help Lay and Warner Brothers "help national defense in general, and the air force [sic] in particular" by giving all the assistance he could to the film. A letter in July from Warner Brothers registering the plot line with the DoD Motion Picture Section states that Lay was to be the film's producer. About the same time Lay wrote to LeMay that the title had been changed to *Flight Line Chief*, and arranged for the project's writer Sam Rolfe, who had written the screenplay for *The McConnell Story*, to get various tours at SAC

headquarters and the NCO Academy. In November Lay again wrote to LeMay saying that he was working on the first draft of the script and that the working title was now simply *Flight Line*, a title that did not seem to excite LeMay. Finally, in April 1956 Lay reported to LeMay that he had completed the second draft and was sending it to Jack Warner for final approval.⁴⁷ According to the credits for the final film, however, Rolfe wrote the story, Irving Wallace wrote the screenplay, and Lay played no role at all.

Perhaps because of Lay's ambiguous role this film's presentation of revolutionary air power themes is far less than any air power film up to this point. The movie is clearly a work of air power advocacy, and revolutionary motifs are present but less often than in earlier films. As in *Strategic Air Command*, the Air Force and strategic nuclear bombing are presented as the only forces keeping the peace and protecting America from nuclear devastation. In a tense scene where Brennan explains to his daughter the importance of what he does, he tells her, "We got to keep our ships and our crews combat ready. And when they're ready no one will dare lay a hand or a bomb on us and maybe someday that will keep you and your children alive." The film even places the air power revolution into a historical perspective when the Wing Commander tells one of his B-52 crews:

For centuries its been the job of a successful general to win wars. But in this nuclear air age its the job of a successful general to prevent wars. Now we think that the way to prevent wars, to deter major aggression, is through superior long range nuclear air power, poised and ready to takeoff at a moment's notice.

As with previous films, *Bombers B-52* also employed traditional images of strategic bombing's effectiveness, but unlike previous works it stresses only the tradition of Douhet. In a scene where crew chiefs are undergoing training for the new aircraft, an

instructor tells the class, "on a single mission one [B-52], just one, can carry greater destructive force than that of all the bombs dropped by the entire Allied air forces during the whole of World War II."⁴⁸

But revolutionary themes could be easily over-powered by the human drama. The tension between Brennan and his daughter over her embarrassment with her father's job, and that between Brennan and his squadron commander, first over the latter's reputation as a carouser, and later when he starts dating Brennan's daughter, creates dramatic scenes that compete with the main plot. The main plot, that Brennan is important to the Air Force and should stay in, does remain the focus throughout, and with an improbable plot twist in the film's climax all parties show their dedication, but this is hardly revolutionary. Much the same could be said for people remaining in the Army, Navy, or Marines. In the final analysis, *Bombers B-52* extolls the Air Force as preeminent in national defense, but the revolutionary themes as the basis for that preeminence which had been a feature of previous films are much more understated.

Still, the Air Force was anxious to lend support and gave considerable aid. Of course, the Air Force requested changes as a condition of its help, but as with other air power movies the objections were superficial and did not change the basic nature of the film. Several individuals objected that there were too many aircraft accidents and inflight incidents, including a B-52 blowing up in mid-air, in the original script. In fact, Donald Baruch, head of the DoD Motion Picture Section, hinted that Boeing had got wind of the high accident rate and requested changes.⁴⁹ The final version included only two inflight problems, a stuck landing gear and an in-flight fire, but in each case the heroic actions of

crewmembers saves the aircraft with little damage. Both SAC and the Air Force objected that the film did not seem to raise the status of NCOs much. SAC mentioned specifically the daughter's embarrassment that her father is only a "sergeant grease monkey," but this did not change the depiction of the daughter's attitude.⁵⁰ Despite these complaints both SAC and the Air Force were quite pleased with the overall story. While it may not have stressed revolutionary air power, it did glamorize the Air Force, NCOs, and the B-52, but more importantly it highlighted SAC and its nuclear role in national defense.

Like the general interest magazine campaign, the effort to venerate SAC through movies continued into the early sixties. In 1963 Universal studios released *A Gathering of Eagles* starring Rock Hudson. The film grew out of a conversation between LeMay and Sy Bartlett, co-author with Beirne Lay of *Twelve O'clock High*. LeMay expressed his concern to Bartlett that recent novels like Peter George's *Red Alert*, at the time being turned into *Dr. Strangelove*, would harm SAC's reputation. Bartlett "instantly" saw the need for a movie to explain to the public SAC's importance. He then wrote the story on which the screenplay was based and produced the film. Delbert Mann, who as a bomber crewmember in World War II flew 35 missions and who had always wanted to make a movie about bombers, directed the film.⁵¹

Much had changed by the early sixties, though. As the next chapter will show, air power was under attack from several directions and images of revolutionary air power seemed naive and had almost totally disappeared from popular culture. Of all the movies highlighting strategic air power, *A Gathering of Eagles* deals with revolutionary themes the least. Like the other two films of the SAC trilogy and the SAC articles of the fifties, it

showcases SAC in the most complimentary terms. But there is little more to its message than the reassuring images of SAC vigilance in ensuring effectiveness, that its people are dedicated and make great sacrifices in performing their mission, and that SAC's positive control procedures virtually ensure that no one could accidentally or maliciously start a nuclear war. The plot involves a base armed with both B-52s and ICBMs that has just failed an operational readiness inspection. In the wake of this failure the wing commander is fired and Colonel Caldwell, played by Hudson, is sent to whip the base into shape for a repeat inspection in the near future. In searching for weaknesses Caldwell finds several people who do not live up to SAC's demanding standards. One such case is the base commander, an old pilot who excelled in the SAC of pre-Sputnik days but who has had trouble adjusting to the new SAC of missiles and the need to launch all aircraft within 15 minutes of missile launch warning. The stress of the new high pressure SAC has driven him to excessive drinking. Another problem is the vice wing commander, Caldwell's best friend, who refuses to make the hard decisions that SAC's mission demands of all its commanders. Caldwell, who has no problem making the hard decisions regardless of personal feelings, fires both commanders and drives the rest of the base's personnel so hard morale begins to slip.⁵²

Complicating the plot and accentuating the pressure on Caldwell is the fact that his new wife does not understand why he needs to be so hard. Other wives come to her with complaints about what Caldwell's training and alert schedule are doing to their family lives but Caldwell turns a deaf ear to her entreaties to relax the pressure. She befriends the Base Commander's wife and is thus shocked to find out that her husband has fired him,

and when the former base commander attempts suicide Caldwell's wife blames her husband. Thinking that the high pressure is unnecessary, she feels she is seeing a side to him she never knew existed and plans to leave him. Before she leaves the reinspection team arrives. Instantly all the morale problems are forgotten as the entire base leaps into action performing heroic feats to ensure that the base passes this time around. As one character says while watching Caldwell struggling with a command problem: "There's a man I thought I'd never be rooting for." This sudden and universal concern to pass the inspection convinces Caldwell's wife that the pressure is real and necessary, that her husband is not unusual, that everyone shares the sense of urgency in meeting SAC's standards. In explaining to Caldwell that she now sees that she was wrong, she tells him of an airman who had just undergone an emergency appendectomy. "Do you know the first thing he asked about when he came round?" she tells him, "his wife or his children? No, he wanted to know how his plane did in the ORI."

All of this undoubtedly conveyed a very positive image of SAC to most of its viewers when the movie first came out, but the movie assumes that its audience recognizes and accepts that SAC is critical to the nation's survival. The revolutionary themes that were a part of earlier films are almost entirely lacking. There are no speeches about how SAC or air power in general is the only thing standing between the American people and defeat or nuclear annihilation. There are no people agonizing over whether what they do is so important that it justifies staying in the Air Force when loved ones urge them to pursue more lucrative civilian careers. In fact, one of the biggest hardships suffered by the family of the fired base commander is that now they are poor and their son must drop out

of Stanford. The closest the film comes to conveying the threat of nuclear devastation is when, in the midst of an alert exercise that has sent the crews and their aircraft to takeoff positions at the end of the runway, Caldwell says to his vice wing commander, “The way things are this could be the real thing.” His companion replies, “You never know.” The command post then broadcasts an announcement that it was an exercise and the crews are visibly relieved. An audience unconditioned to see SAC’s mission as America’s only hope for survival amid a world divided by Cold War tensions would miss much of what prompts the film’s sense of urgency. Anyone unfamiliar with the tense days of the Cuban Missile Crisis might even assume that the pre-Vietnam Air Force must have been obsessed with looking good on inspections and that all SAC commanders must have been martinets.

In the context of the early sixties, though, the Air Force thought highly of the film and gave it considerable support. But giving technical assistance had recently become a problem. In the wake of controversy over the level of Army support in the making of *The Longest Day*, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Arthur Sylvester launched a reevaluation of military assistance to commercial films. The study led to a new set of guidelines for military assistance, and a certain reluctance on Sylvester’s part to authorize future assistance. Bartlett was one of the first to request support under the new rules, and though he submitted a request so closely complying to the new guidelines that Donald Baruch, head of the DoD Motion Picture Section, labeled it “The Bible,” Sylvester turned Bartlett down claiming the film was just another movie to boost the Air Force’s image. When LeMay, by now Air Force Chief of Staff, heard that support had been refused, he personally intervened and gained Sylvester’s quick compliance.⁵³ Despite the detailed

requirements list submitted to Sylvester's office Bartlett got considerably more support on location at Beale Air Force Base in California and at SAC headquarters. LeMay was quite pleased with the final result for he claimed that of all the air power movies this one came the closest to conveying "a true picture of what the military was all about." The public did not share LeMay's sentiments. A reflection of the changed public mood toward air power, the movie finished out the year at only forty-eight on the list of most popular movies.⁵⁴

Before leaving the "SAC trilogy" one common feature bears consideration. Critics have focused on the depictions of family relationships shared by several air power films of the postwar era, particularly *Above and Beyond*, *Strategic Air Command*, *Bombers B-52*, and *A Gathering of Eagles*. In all of these films female family members, usually wives, rebel against the demands the Air Force makes upon their husbands or fathers. Invariably, though, the female character "comes around," accepts the demands, and is reconciled with the male character. Some critics see this plot device as an extraneous romantic digression that detracts from an otherwise good movie, but others have seen it as a reflection of the sexist expectation that women are supposed to submit to male authority and the dictates of hierarchical society.⁵⁵ While this latter observation is certainly valid, the near ubiquity of this depiction of family strife hints at yet another effort to convey the importance of air power to contemporary audiences. In every case the source of conflict is the airman's commitment to the Air Force stemming from his sense that its mission is vital to winning the peace, in the case of *Above and Beyond*, and keeping the peace in later movies. When family troubles arise the airman points to the higher cause, air power's importance to the nation, and in only one case, Sergeant Brennan, does the male agree to abandon that

cause. By the end of each movie, though, the course of events has “reeducated” the female family member and she accepts the sacrifice in the name of what air power is doing for the country. In an era where domestic bliss was elevated to unprecedeted levels, the recurring theme of family strife in films that celebrate the source of that strife seems calculated to convey the message that revolutionary air power is so important to the nation that it even outweighs the family unit and the institution of marriage.⁵⁶

Other Air Force roles besides nuclear strategic bombing appeared in popular culture throughout the period, but such features were never as frequent as features on SAC and the images created were generally crafted to supplement the heroic and capable image of the Air Force in general, not challenge the dominant position of SAC. One example is a 1955 *Saturday Evening Post* article written by Frank Harvey highlighting TAC’s nuclear fighter-bombers. With the nuclear role dominating military planning in the Eisenhower administration TAC sought and acquired a share of the nuclear mission.⁵⁷ In detailing that nuclear role, though, Harvey portrays TAC’s nuclear mission as supplementing SAC’s. Calling SAC America’s long-range “Sunday punch,” he describes TAC’s nuclear force as a “Free World Fire Department, with the mission of settling ‘little wars,’ like Korea, before they can grow big.” As with the magazine articles focusing on SAC, Harvey paints his subjects as efficient, dedicated, and larger-than-life heroes, and in the process further trivializes the subject of nuclear war. Not only is the prospect of all-out nuclear war with the Soviet Union reduced to the image of a “Sunday punch,” but nuclear weapons can even deliver America from another frustrating “small war” like Korea by rushing around the world at jet speeds dropping atomic bombs on every trouble spot.⁵⁸

Two movies from this period focused on other aspects of the Air Force, and they each received a unique form of Air Force endorsement. In 1955 Warner Brothers released *The McConnell Story*, a movie about Joseph McConnell, a leading ace during the Korean War who later was killed while testing new aircraft. The film highlights the air superiority role of tactical air power in the heroic tradition of the fighter ace but little more. There is no larger vision that air power was the decisive element in Korea or that tactical air power was superior to strategic air power. It was just a story about a hero who died in the line of duty.⁵⁹ Universal's 1956 film, *Battle Hymn*, told the story of a World War II fighter pilot, Dean Hess, who accidentally bombs a German orphanage and kills 37 children. Driven by guilt he becomes a minister, but in 1950 he rejoins the Air Force and is sent to train South Korean fighter pilots. When the test of battle comes, Hess finds he can kill again and shoots down two enemy aircraft. The real story, though, comes in Hess' efforts to found and protect an orphanage for Korean refugees. While this film also showcases tactical air power its real message is one Air Force pilot's humanitarian spirit.⁶⁰

What makes these two films unique is that both were introduced by Air Force generals. General O.P. Weyland introduced *The McConnell Story* and spoke briefly about how American freedoms were secured throughout American history by countless men like McConnell. In *Battle Hymn* General Earl E. Partridge, who had commanded the Fifth Air Force in Korea during the war, said that Hess' story "is an affirmation of the essential goodness of the human spirit." On one level these introductions serve as an endorsement of the films that went beyond the usual practice of military support for motion pictures. The presence of a uniformed officer of the highest rank served as a powerful visual

affirmation that the film represented the Air Force. On another level, though, these introductions serve as an indication of just how thoroughly popular culture had come to embrace air power. In the mid-fifties an Air Force general introducing a film might have been unusual but it was not unthinkable. Such a scene at the start of any war movie after Vietnam, on the other hand, can scarcely be imagined.

Television provided a new and increasingly powerful medium where air power was featured, and the wide range of Air Force roles were showcased, but strategic bombing generally appeared as the ultimate definition of air power. In 1953 the ABC series *March of Time* broadcast an episode titled “The Air Age.” While the episode featured aviation of all sorts since the dawn of flight, particularly Korean War fighters, much of its emphasis focuses on the contribution of strategic bombing to World War II. The show even extolls the B-36 for its size and destructive capability.⁶¹

In 1956 CBS launched a year-long series, *Air Power*, a weekly documentary-style program narrated by Walter Cronkite. Like the *March of Time* episode three years earlier, this series outlined aviation developments throughout the history of flight and showcased virtually all air power missions. Numerous episodes focused on the contributions of tactical forces in both World War II and Korea, and air defense received considerable attention. In fact, the premiere episode was a dramatization of a Soviet air attack against North America and depicted how America and Canada would attempt to stop the incoming bombers. In this dramatization, though, air defense forces could not stop all the bombers and the audience is told that the only hope for avoiding nuclear devastation is the threat of retaliation that would leave the Soviets more devastated than America. Several

later episodes focus on strategic bombing in World War II depicting it as a new weapon that could destroy a nation's ability to wage war. In case anybody missed the connection with postwar nuclear bombing, one episode stated that in the nuclear era one plane with one bomb could do what it took 60,000 men to do to the Romanian oil refineries at Ploesti. The series concluded with a final reminder that security could only be gained through a strong bombing force that would deter a Soviet attack on America. "The New Doctrine," an episode that compares Soviet and American nuclear bombing capabilities extolls SAC's efforts to remain ahead of the Soviets in nuclear bombing.⁶²

Television also gave Arthur Godfrey his greatest opportunity to put his air power advocacy before millions of Americans on a routine basis. Godfrey had two weekly television shows running simultaneously between 1948 and 1959, and for much of that time they were both among the top-rated shows in the nation. In 1951 he was converted to the air power cause and from that time on he became a prominent air power advocate.⁶³ He wrote articles, gave speeches and interviews, but judging by his correspondence with LeMay, he did most of his air power work on his television shows. Overall, Godfrey championed a strong Air Force, and thus one of his pet concerns was recruitment and retention. He touted Air Force enlistment on his show for its education opportunities and he worked to improve retention by improving Air Force morale. Two key efforts in this area were boosting military pay and easing the loneliness of duty at isolated bases, and in both he used his television shows as a soapbox from which to rally support.⁶⁴ Godfrey's main concern, though, was SAC, and his television show gave him frequent opportunities to help build its public support. He highlighted SAC and its concerns on the air, he filmed

portions of his shows at SAC bases, and he plugged SAC movies, all the while sending out his simple reassuring message to millions of viewers that their only chance for security was through strategic nuclear deterrence.⁶⁵

The dominant role of nuclear bombing in America's official and cultural defense thinking was a curious episode in American cultural and military history. Despite critics, faith in strategic air power remained strong in both official and unofficial circles through much of the fifties, but in the second half of the decade criticism escalated in both realms. In military and diplomatic areas observers noted that Massive Retaliation left few choices between Armageddon and acquiescence. If a "small war" flared up the U.S. had too few conventional resources to try and meet the new threat, so American leaders had to choose between sending in nuclear weapons or accepting the situation. Both the French disaster at Dien Bien Phu and the crisis in Laos illustrated America's restricted options.⁶⁶ The inflexible nature of Massive Retaliation stems from a fallacy long buried deep in the air power gospel. Just as early aviation enthusiasts had felt that the airplane freed them from the constraints of gravity and physical barriers, air power advocates felt that the warplane freed them from many traditional constraints of war. When theorizing about strategic bombing, for example, they rarely stopped to consider under what circumstances bombing an enemy into submission would be an appropriate strategy, or more important, when it would be inappropriate. Moreover, they did not consider what sort of postwar relationship the U.S. could hope to maintain with a nation that had been bombed to the point of collapse. Nuclear weapons only aggravated this fallacy.

The Kennedy administration moved American defense policy away from a slavish reliance on nuclear obliteration, but official policy could not easily alter cultural attachment to images of salvation through nuclear air power.⁶⁷ The same technological messianistic images that made easy victory through air power such a compelling notion for air power advocates also drew the general public like a siren song. The fallacy of strategic bombing suitable for all occasions exerted a powerful attraction to a society deathly afraid of the Communist threat but confronted with the intractable complexities of the Cold War. In the second half of the fifties, though, and continuing into the early sixties, voices arose in popular culture questioning the popular image of air power in general and strategic bombing in particular. This popular culture counter-revolution started out tentatively but by the early sixties rose to a crescendo and create an alternate image, an alter-ego as it were, of the Mad Bomber that competed with the popular image of SAC. The counter-revolution would not totally eliminate the hold air power had gained on the popular imagination, but it would change the nature of public debate on air power issues and to a great extent end the air power popular culture crusade.

1. Much has been written about American culture during the Cold War; for effects of the Red Scare see Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd. ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), especially chapter 2, and for the effects possible nuclear war on American culture see Weart, *Nuclear Fear*, and Stephen Hilgartner, Richard C. Bell, and Rory O'Connor, *Nukespeak: The Selling of Nuclear Technology in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982); for a visual representation of America fears of nuclear attack see Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, and Pierce Rafferty, prods., *The Atomic Cafe* (New York: The Archives Project, 1982).
2. , Douglas Kinnard, *President Eisenhower and Strategy Management: A Study in Defense Politics* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1977), 7-11, 23-28; for other works that examine Eisenhower defense policies and Massive Retaliation see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), Charles C. Alexander, *Holding the Line: The Eisenhower Era, 1952-1961* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), and on the larger question of nuclear strategy see Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 2nd. ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981, 1989).
3. "Remarks By General Eisenhower," Air Force Association Convention, 13 September 1947, Reel A-1618, frames 1102-06, AFHRA; Carl Spaatz, "Eisenhower and Air Power," *Newsweek* (16 June 1952): 30.
4. Ziemke, "In the Shadow of the Giant," 316.
5. Kelsey-Hayes advertisement, *Newsweek* (31 March 1958): 66.
6. Martin, "Are Our Big Bombers Ready to Go?" 19, 66.
7. Ibid, 65-66.
8. "SAC," *Life* (27 August 1951):86-100, quotes from 87 and 95.
9. Francis V. Drake, "On Guard! The Day and Night Vigil of Our Atom-Bomber Combat Crews," *Reader's Digest* (August 1953): 11-13, quotes from 12.
10. Ibid, 14-23, quote from 14-15.
11. Ibid, 24-25.
12. "Jet Age Man," *Life* (6 December 1954): 141-47, quotes from 141, 146, and 147.
13. Arthur Godfrey, as told to Peter Martin, "This is My Story," *Saturday Evening Post* (24 December 1955): 20-21, 58-61, quote from 59.

14. James A. Michener, "While Others Sleep: The Story of The Strategic Air Command," *Reader's Digest* (October 1957): 68-75, 219-44, biographical sketch on 70, quote on 235.
15. *Ibid*, 219.
16. *Ibid*, 224, 226-28.
17. Clay Blair, Jr., "Who Says Pilots are Obsolete?" *The Saturday Evening Post* (31 May 1958): 31, 63-66, quotes from 64 and 66.
18. Philip Gustafson, "How We Would Strike Back," *Saturday Evening Post* (30 August 1958): 25, 53-56, quotes from 53, 56.
19. *Ibid*, 53, 55.
20. "SAC Alert," *Life* (23 June 1961): 30-35, quotes from 31 and 34.
21. John G. Hubbell, "They Learn to Survive - the Hard Way," *Reader's Digest* (December 1955): 43-51.
22. John G. Hubbell, "Join Me in One of the New Jet Tankers," *Reader's Digest* (August 1957): 50-54, quote from 54.
23. Corey Ford and James Perkins, "Our Key SAC Bases in Spain - and How We Got Them," *Reader's Digest* (August 1958): 23-26.
24. Corey Ford and James Perkins, "Boss of the Misslemen," *Saturday Evening Post* (23 August 1958): 30, 89-90, quotes from 89 and 90.
25. Corey Ford and James Perkins, "With the Men Who Fire the Atlas," *Reader's Digest* (February 1960): 213-18, quotes from 213, 214, 215, 217, and 218.
26. LeMay, *Mission With LeMay*, 220-23.
27. Borowski, *A Hollow Threat*, see particularly chapters 7 and 8.
28. See, for example, Drake, "On Guard!" 12; "SAC," *Life*, 87; and Martin, "Are Our Big Bombers Ready to Go?" 19, 65-66.
29. William Bradford Huie, "The A-Bomb General of Our Air Forces," *Coronet* (October 1950): 87-91, quotes from 87, 89, and 91.
30. Ernest Havemann, "Toughest Cop of the Western World," *Life* (14 June 1954): 133, 134, 136; see also reprint as Ernest Havemann, "Air Guardian of the Western World," *Reader's Digest* (September 1954): 57-62.

31. *Ibid*, 133, 142, 144-45.
32. LeMay, *Mission With LeMay*, 489-94; "Helicopter Safari in Africa," *Life* (10 June 1957): 80-93.
33. "Off Hours of a Tough General," *Life* (20 October 1961): 145-50
34. See Jack Wilson, "Service Rivalries Aren't Likely to Ruffle the Air Force's Calm Nate Twining," *Look* (23 February 1954): 120; Roger Butterfield and Frank Gibney, "The Twining Tradition," *Life* (26 August 1957): 104-14, 119-22; and John G. Hubbell, "Tough Tommy Power - Our Deterrent-in-Chief," *Reader's Digest* (May 1964): 71-76.
35. See chapter 2.
36. See chapter 5.
37. See chapter 5.
38. Milton Sperling, prod., *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell* (Hollywood: Warner Brothers, 1955).
39. "Estimated Grosses of Past Year," *Variety* (2 January 1957): 4.
40. Letter, 13 October 1952, Lay to LeMay, LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Lay folder, LOC; tie to *High Ramparts* is based on story outline, 15 July 1949, Lay to Sory Smith, Director of Air Force Public Relations, Record Group 330, Entry 141, Box 706, High Ramparts folder, National Archives; the outline bears many similarities with *Strategic Air Command*, such as a reservist debating whether to stay in the Air Force or get out to earn higher pay, the reservist's decision to stay in because he is serving a higher purpose, and Lay's stated goal to convince the public and reservists that the Air Force needs the nation's best people willing to sacrifice personal success for the good of the nation.
41. Letters, 14 December 1952, 1 May 1953, 20 October 1953, and 6 November 1953, Lay to LeMay, LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Lay folder, LOC.
42. Letter, 14 December 1952, Lay to LeMay, LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Lay folder, LOC; Lay may have got the 80% figure from LeMay who told him that only 18% of SAC's officers were Regulars; see letter, 21 October 1952, LeMay to Lay.
43. Samuel J. Briskin, prod., *Strategic Air Command* (Hollywood: Paramount, 1955).
44. Letters, 21 October 1952 (quote), 19 November 1953, 15 March 1954, and 7 April 1954, LeMay to Lay, LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Lay folder, LOC.
45. For Air Force support see letters, 28 October 1952, Sory Smith, Director of Public Information, to Lay, and 16 March 1953 and 1 May 1953, Lay to LeMay; on Air Force

suggestions for script changes see letter, 22 May 1953, Lieutenant Colonel Read Tilley, Special Assistant to LeMay, to Lay, and Memo, 20 July 1953, Colonel Paul Carlton, Aide to LeMay, to Tilley; for reaction to Air Force comments see letter, 4 March 1954, Lay to LeMay, all in LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Lay folder, LOC.

46. Letter, 22 December 1952, Lay to LeMay, and memo, 19 May 1954, Major C.E. Thomson, LeMay's Deputy Special Assistant, to LeMay, LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Lay folder, LOC; Molyneaux, *James Stewart*, 121; Weart, *Nuclear Fear*, 218.
47. Letters, 21 March 1955, Warner to LeMay, 15 July 1955, 16 November 1955, and 23 April 1956, Lay to LeMay; for LeMay's reaction to title *Flight Line* see letter, 23 August 1955, LeMay to Lay, all in LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Lay folder, LOC; for letter identifying Lay as the producer see letter, 21 July 1955, George M. Dorsey at Warner Brothers to Donald Baruch, Chief Motion Picture Section, Record Group 330, Entry 1006, Box 32, Bombers B-52 folder, National Archives.
48. Richard Whorf, prod., *Bombers B-52* (Burbank, Calif.: Warner Brothers, 1957).
49. For military objections to high accident rate see memos, 19 June 1956, from Donald Baruch, and 11 July 1956, from Charles Hinkle, Air Force Office of Security Review, and letter, undated, no author, no recipient, titled "SAC Comments on 'Flight Line' Script"; for reference to Boeing objections see memo, 24 September 1956, from Donald Baruch, all in Record Group 330, Entry 1006, Box 32, Bombers B-52 folder, National Archives.
50. Memo, 3 October 1956, from C. Gordon Furbish, Chief, Pictorial Branch, Air Force Office of Information, and letter, 9 October 1956, Baruch to George Dorsey, Warner Brothers; for objection to daughter's attitude, "SAC Comments on 'Flight Line' Script," all in Record Group 330, Entry 1006, Box 32, Bombers B-52 folder, National Archives.
51. Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 168-70; Pendo, *Aviation in the Cinema*, 265.
52. Sy Bartlett, prod., *A Gathering of Eagles* (Universal City, Calif.: Universal-International, 1963).
53. Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 167-70.
54. Ibid, 170; 4126th Strategic Wing, Heavy, unit history, May and June 1962, K-WG-4126-HI, AFHRA; "Top Rental Features of 1963," *Variety* (8 January 1964): 71.
55. See for example, Pendo, *Aviation in the Cinema*, 220, 263-64; Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 169-70, 218; Paris, *From the Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 184-87; Weart, *Nuclear Fear*, 149-51; and the at times patently absurd, Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love The Fifties* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 64-69.

56. For a study of cultural images that stressed the paramount importance of family, and especially traditional female roles within the family, during the Cold War see, Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), especially 109-13.

57. Ziemke, "In the Shadow of the Giant," chapter 5.

58. Frank Harvey, "Those Half-Pint A-Bombers!" *Saturday Evening Post* (5 November 1955): 32-33, 127, 130, quote from 127.

59. Henry Blanke, prod., *The McConnell Story* (Hollywood, Calif.: Warner Brothers, 1955).

60. Ross Hunter, prod., *Battle Hymn* (Universal City, Calif.: Universal-International, 1956).

61. "The Air Age," *The March of Time* (New York: American Broadcasting Company, 1953). The Library of Congress holds a copy of this episode in its Motion Picture and Television section.

62. Perry Wolff, prod., *Air Power* (New York: Columbia Broadcasting System, 1956-57).

63. See chapter 3.

64. Letters, 22 December 1952, Godfrey to LeMay, 29 July 1953, 16 September 1953, and 24 March 1954, LeMay to Godfrey, and 5 June 1958, Ralph Cordiner, member of DoD Committee on Military Pay, to Godfrey, LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Godfrey folder, LOC; Bill Davidson, "Arthur Godfrey and His Fan Mail," *Collier's* (2 May 1953): 11-13.

65. Letters, 15 April 1954, LeMay to Godfrey, and 13 June 1956, Reade Tilley, SAC Chief of Information, to Godfrey, LeMay Papers, Box A-3, Godfrey folder, LOC.

66. Massive Retaliation critiques are many, see for example, Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), and Richard A. Aliano, *American Defense Policy From Eisenhower to Kennedy: The Politics of Changing Military Requirements, 1957-1961* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1975), chapter 1.

67. For the transition from Eisenhower's defense policies to the Kennedy administration's see Aliano, *American Defense Policy*; for a comparison of the two administrations within the context of the Cold War see Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* and Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*; and for the formulation of defense policy in the Kennedy administration see Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much is Enough? Shaping the Defense Program, 1961-1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

CHAPTER 8

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF AIR POWER: END OF THE POPULAR CULTURE CRUSADE

Opposition to the image of the bomb began in popular culture almost immediately after the atomic bomb blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Most notable in this regard was John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, published in 1946. The book was a best-seller, was reprinted in *The New Yorker*, and was read in half-hour installments over ABC radio. Other works also appeared that same year. Hermann Hagedorn wrote an epic poem, "The Bomb That Fell on America," and in March Lewis Mumford's "Gentlemen, You Are Mad!" appeared in *Saturday Review*. About this same time the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* emerged as a forum for anti-nuclear debate.¹ With the exception of Hersey, though, these and other works were obscure or reached a relatively small segment of the public, and they represent a minority view toward the atomic bomb. Furthermore, all of these works focused on the bomb itself, not the image of air power. Before World War II there had been considerable debate over the morality of bombing and some even denounced air power as a scourge on humanity, but after the war such concerns faded away as debate focused on the atomic bomb.² This lack of opposition to air power continued for the most part until the mid-fifties and left air power advocates with a clear field to preach their revolution.

For several years air power advocates exploited their opportunity and through popular culture preached faith in air power with considerable success. Throughout the late forties they shaped their image of revolutionary air power while keeping institutional concerns, such as the call for an independent Air Force, buried within the framework of the air power gospel. The challenges of 1949 through 1953, though, forced them to defend their revolution and its emphasis on strategic bombing. The image they shaped in this period increasingly emphasized the institutions of air power, particularly the Air Force and SAC. The emergence of strategic nuclear bombing and SAC during the early fifties as the ultimate expression of air power wed the air power revolution to nuclear weapons to such an extent that support for air power meant support for nuclear warfare while opposition to nuclear warfare increasingly meant opposition to air power. But in the last half of the decade growing segments of the American public began having serious doubts about nuclear weapons, and as a result they began questioning their faith in air power.

In the latter half of the 1950s several factors helped spark a dramatic surge in the anti-nuclear movement in America. Both Spencer Weart and H. Bruce Franklin credit the launching of Sputnik in 1957 with the dramatic rise of anti-nuclear sentiments and literature in the U.S. and that event undoubtedly was the main overt impetus, but there was something more, something less tangible, that helped make the cultural atmosphere ripe for dissension through the late fifties and early sixties.³ A contributing factor to the growing fear of nuclear weapons was a vague but increasingly perceptible loss of faith in the revolutionary promise of air power. Some of this can be traced through what *did* appear in popular culture between 1956 and 1964, but it can also be detected in what *did*

not appear or what was no longer present. What *did* appear beginning in the last half of the decade was a series of novels making the first tentative assaults on the images of air power, and in the early sixties the trend quickened with escalated attacks. These novels did not signal an all-out abandonment of faith in air power, a point born out by the fact that movies made from the early novels tended to dilute or down-play the anti-air power sentiments. In the early sixties, though, the films made from novels with anti-air power sentiments retained and even heightened the attacks on air power images.

This chapter will examine the shape of the anti-air power literature in popular culture, but one should also note what *did not* appear, or more precisely, what was no longer present. Something had changed in pro-air power circles and in society's response to air power. As the fifties wore on the air power popular culture campaign emphasized less and less the revolutionary image of air power. Each succeeding installment of the SAC trilogy contained less emphasis on revolutionary themes. Magazine articles bear out this trend as well. Increasingly emphasizing institutions, especially SAC, few articles extolled the brave new future of air power as had characterized much of the pro-air power material of the late forties. In 1948 *Collier's* had devoted the better part of an entire issue to the 45th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first flight, but the seemingly more significant 50th anniversary in 1953 drew far less coverage. In 1954 *Life* published an article harkening to the great air age ahead and it published another in 1956, but these are conspicuous for being exceptions. Perhaps the best indication of this lack of emphasis is the fact that the 1959-1961 edition of *Reader's Guide to Periodic Literature* omits the category "Air Power," a heading it had listed since its 1932-1935 edition.⁴ The 1956-57

CBS television series *Air Power* cast its subject in a revolutionary context but individual episodes frequently stressed that it was a revolution that carried both dangerous and beneficial portent.

Something had changed in American society too. The simple faith in air power built up in the late forties and nurtured through the early fifties was slipping away. The impact of Sputnik in awakening public fears should not be minimized, but this was not the first nuclear-related shock the Soviets had inflicted on the American public. The difference in public reaction in 1957 as opposed to the response to the 1949 Soviet atomic bomb blast illustrates the declining faith in air power. As in 1949 a spate of articles appeared in general interest magazines reassuring Americans that air power had an answer to the new threat. Many of these articles reassured the public that SAC's bombers were still a relevant deterrent, but others hailed the rapid development of new missiles that the Air Force would use to deter a Soviet missile attack.⁵ These assurances did not allay fears as had the earlier campaign, though, for it seems the public was no longer in the mood to accept blind faith in air power.

What was behind this declining faith? That is a tough question to answer for it hinges on intangible factors like images, moods, and attitudes that are often reflected in non-events such as what was no longer said or shown. Furthermore, support for air power did not disappear quickly or completely by any means. Still, public moods do change, and several factors favoring public faith in air power had changed. For one thing, much of the faith in air power stemmed from the long-standing fascination with aviation in general. But by 1957 flight was becoming a commonplace phenomenon that many had

grown up with or were coming to take for granted. Secondly, new wonders such as spaceflight, television, and computers were edging out the airplane as the symbol of high technology. Yet another significant factor was the air power advocates' shift in emphasis from revolutionary themes to the Air Force's institutional needs. Essentially, air power's evangelists abandoned the eschatology of their faith, air power's redemptive qualities, for the mundane bureaucratic aggrandizement of the organization that supposedly embodied that faith. Furthermore, when critics began launching attacks on both air power and the Air Force, air power advocates defended the institution but not the faith. Thus the institutionalization of air power in the Air Force wed the air power revolution to the fortunes of a bureaucratic organization, led the air power advocates away from their original vision, and paved the way for the disillusionment of the American public. All of this would tend to weaken the technological messianism that invested air power with its seeming powers of salvation.

Weart offers a theory in a related context that may give yet another explanation for why people lost faith. In discussing why many eventually fell silent on the nuclear debate he points to "cognitive dissonance," that people often choose to ignore the "dissonance" or discrepancy between their fears and their actions when the options become too complex for easy solution.⁶ In the air power context this could have been a factor, for as long as America had a nuclear monopoly or SAC bombers and air defense seemed to offer a reasonably valid measure of protection, people could put their faith in air power to protect them from enemy air power. Missiles that could strike suddenly with little or no warning, however, made countering the Soviet threat too complex for easy faith but the unilateral

disarmament that some seemed to advocate did not offer much of an alternative either.

Increasingly people chose not to choose. They could not abandon air power but they could no longer continue the naive faith either.

For whatever reason, people began to lose faith in air power and one reflection of this is the publication, and increasing popularity, of works in popular culture that questioned or attacked the dominant image of air power. Starting in the second half of the fifties and accelerating through the early sixties, novels and movies escalated their attacks and drew ever larger audiences. By the end of the period depictions of air power that would have been unthinkable in the early fifties were becoming best-sellers and classics. These works not only reflect the loss of faith in air power, they undoubtedly accelerated it as well. They also changed another aspect of the popular culture air power debate. By 1963 works that unquestioning lauded air power were becoming rare. *A Gathering of Eagles* was the last film glorifying SAC, it did poorly at the box office, and it was the last positive depiction of air power until well into the 1980s. The same was true of general interest magazines. Positive portrayals would still appear, especially in *Reader's Digest*, but the new tone is best captured by James Atwater's 1963 *Saturday Evening Post* article that examines SAC's *Minuteman* missile operations. While it gives SAC's side of the story thoroughly, the old cloying praise is gone and is replaced with guarded respect and healthy scepticism.⁷

The assault on air power from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties, then, is both an indication of, and a spur to, the public's loss of faith in air power. It is ironic in a way that one of the leading causes of the demise of the cult of air power would be popular culture,

because popular culture had been such an effective tool in building that cult from the earliest days in the first place. In a sense air power advocates learned that “he who lives by the sword dies by the sword.”

THE EARLY YEARS: A CHANGE OF TONE

Beginning in 1956 works began appearing in literature that took the first tentative steps toward questioning the cult of air power. The trend continued through the decade with the attacks becoming increasingly bold and straight-forward. Some of these novels were turned into major motion pictures with “big name” stars like Robert Mitchum, Steve McQueen, and Robert Wagner, but the movie studios lagged behind the novelists in their willingness to challenge the air power gospel. In every case the film version toned down the anti-air power elements that had been major features of the novel upon which it was based. Perhaps the changes were made because studio executives still felt an attachment to the cause of air power, perhaps it was simply that they believed the audience was not ready to see their air heroes depicted as borderline pathological killers. In either case, this reluctance to undermine the image of air power in film reflects the slow and incremental nature of the changing attitude toward air power in popular culture.

One novel that came out in 1956, Ward Taylor’s *Roll Back the Sky*, is a good example of the tentative nature of early negative depictions of air power. The book is a psychological drama dealing with the bombing campaign against Japan in the last six months of World War II. Taylor was a career Air Force officer who flew B-29s in the Pacific theater during the war and he returned to that subject in this novel written while he

was still in the Air Force. The plot revolves around a B-29 pilot and his crew and begins about the time of the 9-10 March 1945 firebombing raid on Tokyo. The image of air power, as conveyed through the thoughts and reaction of the pilot, his crewmembers, and the entire group of which they are members is, at best, schizophrenic.

On one level the novel seems to be just another story about men in war. The pilot, Richardson, his crew, and many others fear death and sweat out each mission. There is also the familiar love triangle when Richardson, who is married, falls in love with a Red Cross volunteer stationed near his base on Saipan. On another level, though, Taylor seems to be building toward an indictment of strategic bombing. Early in the novel when Richardson's crew flies on the Tokyo firebombing mission their first sight of the city, already in flames, is described first as a lovely scene: "In a chilling, menacing way it was beautiful.... It was not unlike a flaming sunrise, ...a delicate pink." Almost immediately, though, it turns to a horrible spectacle: "In a few seconds...the glow had changed enormously. It was no longer beautiful. Now it was a pulsing, angry red. At its base the color faded and became streaked with white; at its top the tone was orange, and there was a fitful flicker."⁸

After the flight some of Richardson's crewmembers start experiencing medical problems. His radar operator complains of a foot injury and begins acting strangely, one of his gunners experiences an unsettled stomach, but most serious is his bombardier, Wilson, who begins suffering from stomach problems and headaches. The author links this sudden onset of physical maladies to the crewmembers' reaction to the firebombing. In explaining his sudden ailments to Richardson, Wilson says:

looking at those fires was like looking down into the door of a furnace, and I thought about all the people burning down there and how they must hate me and want to kill me, and I couldn't blame them.... I was just all sick inside and I felt like I couldn't move.... I was afraid of them, afraid they'd kill me. I could feel them hating me and wanting to kill me. I can still feel them hating me.”⁹

Moreover, the whole Group experiences a psychosomatic onset of mysterious problems. Most noticeable is the group commander who seems to be slowly decaying before their eyes until he is killed on a bombing mission.¹⁰

But just when it appears that Taylor is building to a powerful statement, he backs off. Wilson's problem becomes a main focus through five chapters and climaxes on a firebombing mission over the target. Before the mission he had told Richardson that he was too sick to fly but the pilot, sensing that Wilson was just scared, orders him into the plane. Wilson's fear mounts through the flight, and then just short of the target he abandons his bomb sight. Richardson, in an “animal-like” rage, confronts him and without a word spoken by either Wilson returns to his position and completes the bomb run. After the flight Wilson explained that Richardson had forced him to confront and conquer his fear and thereafter performs like the perfect bombardier.¹¹

After this Taylor says little more about bombing and turns instead to Richardson's feelings about war. In this vein, though, Taylor does not question the nature of air power, or even modern warfare, but war in general. Richardson had always wanted to be a soldier and had joined the AAF hoping to find glory and fulfillment in war. What he finds, however, is that war is just fear and death. There are no heroes. One could sense in this a repudiation of the glory of air power that was often a part of the air power advocates' message but Taylor does not develop this theme. Instead Richardson repudiates the quest

for glory and finds that the real meaning in life is a personal affirmation of hope. The realization bursts upon him in the midst of combat as he struggles with his own fears. He discovers that only through hope for the future will he find meaning in life and he thus rediscovers his love for his wife. What we have, then, is a book that raises questions about air power and its effect on the human spirit but which pushes the point fitfully and never drives an anti-air power message to the point that would make it a true attack.

The other novel dealing with air power published in 1956 was James Salter's *The Hunters*. Another psychological study, it revolves around a fighter pilot's experiences in the Korean War. Salter had been a fighter pilot during the war and undoubtedly the novel reflects his perceptions of that experience. The fact that he originally published the novel anonymously indicates that he intended it to be something of an exposé.¹² The central character, Captain Cleve Saville, is in some respects an anti-hero in that he rejects the heroic image of the world in which the war has placed him, the world of fighter pilots in an F-86 group based in South Korea. Throughout the novel, though, as the reader learns about the fighter pilot world, its heroic image emerges as a pathological ideal of perverted and inverted values. By ultimately rejecting this heroic image, therefore, Saville actually turns out to be heroic. But Saville dies in the course of combat, having never achieved the highly sought status that defines the hero in the fighter world, the status of ace. All who do reach this status are grotesque caricatures of depravity, thus conveying the image that success in air combat can only be achieved by the most anti-social elements.¹³

By all measures short of combat, Saville should be honored in his world. He was a superb pilot in peacetime who had flown with the Air Force acrobatic team and had won a

prestigious air-to-air fighter competition. When he arrives in Korea his group commander, who had flown with Saville before the war, is glad to have such a famous pilot in his unit and makes Saville a flight commander. Saville, though, is also depicted throughout the novel as a sensitive, thoughtful individual as best seen when he courts a young Japanese woman while on leave in Tokyo.¹⁴ The same aggressive nature that made Saville a good fighter pilot also compels him toward the goal of becoming an ace, but as aerial victories elude him, he becomes at first frustrated and then introspective. In the meantime, he watches the methods used by his fellow fighter pilots to achieve success, and he is increasingly revolted. He searches for what it is within himself that makes him feel that failure to become an ace will equate to a personal defeat. In the end, he achieves his second kill by shooting down the leading enemy ace but rejects the accolades by ascribing the victory to his wingman, who died on the mission.¹⁵ By the time Saville dies, four missions short of the end of his tour, he is at peace with himself and the fact that he has won true honor by remaining virtuous even though the fighter world regards him a failure.

In direct contrast to Saville are the two figures in the novel who achieve the most success in the fighter pilot world but who act despicably. One is Lieutenant Pell, a new pilot straight out of training. Pell is an egotistical loner desperate for glory and willing to do anything, moral or immoral, to become an ace. Pell is placed in Saville's flight and immediately begins undermining Saville's reputation with the other flight members and the Group's leadership. The other villain is Colonel Imil, the group commander. Imil was an ace in World War II and an ace again in Korea. He cares about one thing, and one thing only: chalking up the best kill record for his group. In a dramatic scene that reveals both

Pell's and Imil's true values, Pell abandons his element leader during combat to pursue and shoot down his fifth enemy aircraft. His element leader, having been left unprotected by his wingman, is killed, and Saville demands that Pell be grounded. Pell lies about what happened, and Imil suddenly turns on his old friend, berates him in front of the Group, and says, "A man with five victories, and you want me to ground him? What's wrong with you? He ought to be a flight commander."¹⁶

Other characters sharpen the perversity of the dichotomous world of the fighter pilot. Major Abbott, another World War II ace who seems to have lost the winning edge, is treated like a pariah by everyone in the Group and feels like his life has lost all meaning. He is transferred to a staff job in Seoul but he can not stay away and comes back to visit. The two element leaders in Saville's flight, Corona and Daughters, figure out what Pell is doing, but Daughters is killed by Pell's betrayal, and Corona returns home at the end of his tour wanting nothing more to do with the Air Force or airplanes. The other members of the flight, Lieutenants Hunter and Pettibone, young and eager, follow Pell everywhere, worship him, and ape his ways, but like stereotypical toadies they gain no achievements of their own. High ranking Group staff officers whose only fault is that they have no kills are berated and ridiculed in front of lower-ranking officers while lieutenants who do have kills are shown the deference and honor usually reserved for those of much higher rank. Taken together the world of fighter pilots that Salter portrays seems to be a place where virtues such as honor, loyalty, and teamwork count for nothing and personal victory, even at the cost of a comrade's life, is the only virtue that is recognized. This was hardly an image of air power ushering in a better world.

When *The Hunters* was made into a movie in 1958, however, many of the negative elements were considerably softened. Saville's character was radically altered. Instead of a sensitive man who is disenchanted, and finally killed, by the perverted world he finds in Korea, he becomes a hard man who is softened by the compassion he learns while at war. Pell becomes a hip, cocky loner who matures into a team player willing to sacrifice himself to save his buddies. Imil is reduced to almost a bit part, but in the dramatic scene where Pell's actions cause the death of his element leader, Imil appears as a man trying to be fair in the face of conflicting accounts and who promotes Pell, after a stern verbal reprimand, because there is no one else to fill the now-vacant position. The novel's minor character, Major Abbott, is elevated to a supporting role as Lieutenant Abbott, a man whose fear of combat drives him to excessive drinking and who closes himself off from his wife and anyone who would try to befriend him. The new theme of the story is the redemption the airmen find in their mutual interdependence of air combat. When Abbott is shot down Saville crash-lands to save him. Pell, disobeying orders, returns to strafe enemy troops pursuing Saville and Abbott and is shot down by ground fire. Together the three men, each of whom had shown anti-social character flaws up to that point, make their way from deep inside enemy territory to the safety of their own lines and on the way shed their old ways and become truly heroic figures.¹⁷

Ironically, when Twentieth Century-Fox sought technical support to make the movie the Air Force objected to the radical plot changes. The Air Force had suggested the novel to the studio as a story it would like to see turned into a movie, and after obtaining the rights Twentieth Century-Fox submitted a story synopsis that followed the

novel to a remarkable degree.¹⁸ The Air Force's initial reaction was guarded. In August 1956 Baruch cautioned the studio that, "[t]he Air Force indicates that the background of the story may offer some problems in extending full cooperation." The Air Force seems to have been concerned about the large amount of aerial filming that might be required, for a 1957 letter granting official support warned, "The studio should be advised, with great emphasis, that the granting of such cooperation does not automatically assure them of the use of the large number of aircraft and amount of equipment that they might desire."¹⁹

By the next year the script had undergone the radical changes outlined above, and suddenly the Air Force threatened to withhold cooperation. Claiming it had liked the book much better and that it had given initial approval based on a synopsis that followed the book, the Air Force complained that there were no redeeming characters in the script. They objected to Saville's lack of feelings and his pursuit of Abbott's estranged wife, and to "the 'switch-blade knife' characterization of Lt. Pell." In fact the Air Force considered both characters to be "punks." Predictably they resented the frequent drunkenness of Abbott, and they considered Imil's brief portrayal as little more than a "bellowing clown." Finally, they dismissed the redemption element, the rescue of Abbott, and the escape from enemy territory as superficial action and adventure and felt that the changes had subverted "what was fundamentally an honest fictional study of jet aces and what made them effective 'Hunters' in the Korean War."²⁰ Ultimately the Air Force and the studio reached a compromise, for the film was made with considerable Air Force help and was approved for release, but the elements objectionable to the Air Force remained.²¹

The whole episode betrays a curious logic on the part of the Air Force. Granted the characters of Saville and Abbott were degraded considerably from the novel version, but Imil is totally rehabilitated from a characterization of the worst sort of unscrupulous commander and Pell is toned down considerably. Most important, though, is that Saville, Abbott, and Pell are all redeemed by the end of the movie and the image of the Air Force is highly reassuring. To characterize as “fundamentally honest” a novel that portrays successful fighters as those who are twisted and unscrupulous, while everyone who possesses any normalcy and decency fails by the fighters’ standards and either dies or goes home in disgust indicates that the Air Force either did not understand the deeper meanings or did not find them repulsive. It objected to excessive drinking and adultery but accepted promoting those who obtained glory by getting their leaders killed.

It is significant that both *Roll Back the Sky* and *The Hunters* were written by Air Force pilots writing about their own experiences in war. Up to this point almost all fliers had been air power advocates, and from the earliest days of flight they had been among its greatest, and loudest, champions. Furthermore, air power advocates had nearly always maintained a solid front in proclaiming through popular culture that air power was an unqualified benefit to humanity. In 1956, however, two pilots, both having the clearest possible view of what air power could do, presented some disturbing images of air power, jaded images that suggested air power might not be the progressive enlightening force that the public had been led to believe. Their image suggested that air power ate at the heart of the human spirit, and they presented these images through the same medium, popular culture, that their fellow airmen had long used to propagate the image of air power’s

innate nobility. But Taylor and Salter did not directly attack air power as a danger to the world. That attack would not come for several years.

PAST AND FUTURE WARS: TWO FRIGHTENING IMAGES

In 1957 and 1959 two novels appeared that further questioned the reputation of air power in the general public and in each case the intensity of the challenge was escalated above that which had gone before. The damage was all the greater to the air power cause because both books enjoyed a greater notoriety than the works of Taylor and Salter, but in each case the movie that issued from the books toned down the negative air power images. The first was Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* and the second was John Hersey's *The War Lover*. Taken together the novels and the movies illustrate that while some voices were willing to raise serious questions about the promises made for air power, others were still reluctant to press the point too far.

On the Beach is not strictly speaking an anti-air power book. More anti-nuclear in its message it still presents some negative images of air power, especially if one remembers air power advocates' earlier claims and the fact that Shute had been an RAF pilot. More important, though, the book attacks the notion of nuclear war, and because air power had so thoroughly wed itself to nuclear weapons, and since in 1957 bombers were still the only way to deliver nuclear bombs, any attack on nuclear war became an attack on air power's primary image. Between the novel and the film millions saw the negative images. The book was a best-seller, was serialized by more than forty newspapers, and sold more than any other book on nuclear issues. The film was also a hit. It was the eighth most popular

film of its year and grossed over \$6 million. More people saw it than any other nuclear movie except *Strategic Air Command*. The popularity of the book and film posed such a clear threat to public support for America's reliance upon nuclear air power that the Eisenhower administration considered attempts to discredit the movie, and government experts attacked Shute's notion that bombs could wipe out all life on earth.²²

The central premise of the novel is that a nuclear war involving several nations in the northern hemisphere has elevated radioactivity in the atmosphere of the north so high that all animal life dies. The radioactivity is working its way south, and as the main characters in Australia monitor that spread they await their own doom. The plot revolves around the activities of the characters as they approach their imminent deaths. Much of the action is pedestrian as people strive to maintain normalcy while the clock ticks down, and there is the obligatory romantic interest, but this is what gives the book's anti-nuclear message its power. Most people can see themselves and their own petty schemes coming to nothing as they watch death approach. But on a few occasions Shute reveals glimpses of what happened in "The Short War" and it is not a reassuring view of air power.

The Short War, as the Australians call it, lasted only 37 days and during that time, according to scientific estimations, at least 4700 nuclear weapons were detonated by all belligerents.²³ The duration certainly complies with those air power advocates who predicted short wars in the nuclear air age, but the novel's outcome was hardly the happy results promised by the airmen. The number of nuclear weapons and the world-wide tragedy that results also served as one man's response to those air power advocates, such as de Seversky, who said that thousands of nuclear weapons could be used against an

enemy nation and still leave its society intact.²⁴ The most negative image of air power, though, is the description of how the war started and how it was conducted. It began in the midst of an Arab-Israeli war when Albania dropped a bomb on Naples, Italy, and some unknown country bombed Tel Aviv. The U.S. and Britain intervened with demonstration flights over Cairo, and the Egyptians retaliated by launching six long-range Soviet bombers with Soviet markings against Washington, D.C., and seven against London. One got through to Washington and two to London. Most of the statesmen in both capitals were killed leaving decision-making to military leaders who launched a retaliatory strike against the Soviets discovering only too late that it was a mistake. By then chaos reigned as critical decisions devolved to ever lower echelons of military commands. In the midst of the Soviet - NATO nuclear war another one breaks out between China and the Soviet Union, and at one point near the end China was being run by an Air Force major.²⁵

What the reader sees, therefore, is that air power has made nuclear war too easy to start, impossible to defend against, and because of its speed and destructive capability, impossible to control if unanticipated events occurred. In short, air power in the form of strategic nuclear bombing was too inflexible to serve as any rational form of defense. If anybody missed this point, Shute drove the image home explicitly. When one character suggests that the problem was that nuclear weapons had become too cheap and readily available to even the smallest country, another counters, "Another was the aeroplanes.... The Russians had been giving the Egyptians aeroplanes for years. So had Britain for that matter, and to Israel, and to Jordan. The big mistake was ever to have given them a long-range aeroplane."²⁶

None of this background information made its way into the movie, though. When the question of *how* the war started arises the characters all say that no one knows the specific details. In response to the question of *who* started the war, though, the answer becomes philosophical and the guilt communal. Everyone started the war by relying on nuclear weapons. When an Australian scientist is asked who started the war he replies:

The war started when people accepted the idiotic principle that peace could be maintained by arranging to defend themselves with weapons they couldn't possibly use without committing suicide. Everybody had an atomic bomb and counter-bombs and counter-counter-bombs. The devices outgrew us, we couldn't control them. I know, I helped build them, God help me. Somewhere some poor bloke probably looked at a radar screen and thought he saw something, knew that if he hesitated one thousandth of a second his own country would be wiped off the map so, so he pushed the button, and, and the world went crazy.²⁷

Thus the film emphasized an anti-nuclear message and only indirectly implicates air power in the disaster. By conveying its message in the powerful visual medium of the cinema, though, the film was quite effective. People were seen leaving theaters in tears and others point to the effect the film had on shaping their views on nuclear issues.²⁸ Still, negative images of nuclear war in 1959 could not help but undermine public faith in nuclear air power even if air power was not directly incriminated in the unfolding tragedy.

1959 saw a much more direct attack launched against the image of air power, and one that focused expressly on the image of strategic bombing. John Hersey, the author of *Hiroshima*, created an image with his novel *The War Lover* that might best be described as a photographic negative of the image presented in *Twelve O'clock High*. The setting is the same, the B-17 bombing campaign against Germany in World War II. Both novels set the climactic scene in the same air battle, the bombing raid on Schweinfurt. Both even end

with the hero's plane ditching in the English Channel. The plot is also a psychological study of the men who fly the bombers. The title character, though, is not the heroic image of General Savage, but instead a psychopathic B-17 pilot, Captain Buzz Marrow, who like Savage is meant to embody air power itself. The second main character, the story's narrator, is Marrow's co-pilot, Lieutenant Charles Boman, a thoughtful humanist whose growing understanding of Marrow represents society's awakening awareness of air power's true nature. Literary critics see *The War Lover* as a tale of survival, of the humanist learning to survive in the face of all things that destroy life, but for the purposes of this study it is important to view the novel from the perspective of what Hersey saw as the destructive force that threatened humanity.²⁹

In *The War Lover* Marrow clearly, even repetitiously, emerges as a twisted psychotic obsessed with destruction but his obsession is solely associated with airplanes. So repetitive and grotesque are Marrow's faults that clearly Hersey is trying to demystify the image of air power through this one character. As Laurence Goldstein has observed, "Hersey understands the dead-end of the aerial technician's vision," and that the novel offers "an alternative to Air Power as a dominant cultural myth."³⁰ Throughout the novel Hersey depicts Marrow as the perfect flier. He flies by instinct, almost as if he and the airplane were one. But Hersey's portrayal has strong sexual overtones. When Marrow first sees the B-17 that has been assigned to his crew he says, "Some torso, huh?... Just seeing that thing makes me feel horny. I can't wait to get my hands on her." He later christens the ship "The Body," and after their first bomb run Marrow told the bombardier that when he had heard the words "Bombs away!" he experienced the best feeling he had

ever had short of sex.³¹ Marrow's representation also conveys a perverse image of the tradition of Douhet long embedded in American strategic bombing. In describing Marrow's reaction when looking at strike photos Boman says he looks like:

a man who has just taken a big slug of strong booze, when the throat burns and the first relaxing ecstasy shoots through the chest - with the difference that he seemed to be able to savor that first stab, prolong it, hold onto it.

At another point Marrow says of a bomb run gone bad, "I didn't care where the f--- [sic] we dropped those bombs as long as it was on a city. You can't win a war being squeamish... You have to kill *somebody*."³²

The character of Boman serves as an example to the American public as he slowly comes to realize Marrow's true nature. Through him Hersey hopes to enlighten the public about the real character of air power and how they should respond to it. At first Boman, like the popular imagination's response to aviation, idolized Marrow and put great trust in him to get the whole crew safely through their tour. Slowly, though, Boman comes to realize that Marrow's skill and bravado are just a facade, he is an empty shell and his love of war and thirst for destruction threatens to get them all killed. More important, Boman comes to realize that Marrow threatens to squash all humanity, all that is good in Boman's spirit.³³ Helping him toward this realization are two supporting characters who are the first to figure out what Marrow really is.

The first character is Lieutenant Lynch, an intellectual who represents the rational response to air power. So much of the appeal of air power had been rational, it seemed to make sense that if bombs were dropped on key enemy industries it had to have a magnified effect on their warfighting capabilities. Lynch on several occasions indicates that, in his

view, such thinking is only superficially efficient, that beneath the surface it is barbaric. On one occasion, for example, after explaining to Boman the superficiality of Marrow's attitude toward war, Boman asks what brought up that observation seemingly out of the blue, and Lynch replies:

it strikes me that in this century something awful has been let loose among the so-called civilized peoples, something primitive and barbaric.... If I can do my part in keeping this worst side of mankind in hand, I'll be satisfied, whatever happens to me.

What happens to Lynch, though, is that he is killed, and in describing the scene Hersey plays on the intellectual theme by stressing repeatedly how Lynch's brains were splattered all over the cockpit.³⁴

More important is Boman's British girlfriend Daphne. A sensitive, introspective woman, she first senses Marrow's spiritual emptiness and represents Hersey's response to the air power's emotive appeal. Aviation had exerted a strong emotional hold on popular imagination and in the postwar environment Cold War fears had turned that emotional attachment into a desperate faith that air power could save America from the Soviet threat. Through Daphne the reader learns that Marrow, and by extension air power, is just a thin veneer of strength and potency that in reality is a greater danger than perpetuates war. Part of Daphne's insight comes from the fact that she had known other fliers and that Marrow's sickness is not confined to him or to the American airmen. She had been engaged to an RAF bomber pilot who was so obsessed with killing and destroying that when his first tour ended he transitioned to night fighters so he could go on killing and destroying. "He was like a blood brother to [Marrow].... As like as two peas in a pod."³⁵

Her important insight, though, concerns the significance of men like Marrow. In describing to Boman the crucial episode where Marrow tried to seduce her she says,

I understood, then. It was from [the RAF pilot] that I understood. I said, "I know all about you.... That feeling when the plane shudders because the bombs are falling out.... The feeling you have - you have that stirring down there, don't you Major? - when you start the bombing run."

Then speaking of men like Marrow and her RAF pilot she tells Boman,

I think we ought to worry...more about what's going to come of those who enjoy [war] too much. They're going to inflict their curse on the rest of us in peacetime. They're going to pass it on to their children. We'll have other wars.... I don't know what we can do about these men, how you can educate this thing out of them, or stamp it out, or heal it out - or whether you can get rid of it at all.³⁶

Boman's growing understanding of Marrow's true nature imparted to him by Lynch and Daphne changes his attitude toward flying and air power. At first he had loved flying and yearned to be, like Marrow, the perfect pilot. He even subscribed to the pilot mystique: "We had the illusion that between aviators there was a mysterious bond, that we were sharers of a secret.... It was much later, with Daphne's help, that I realized that... his dream in the sky and mine were far apart in kind."³⁷ Concurrent with his awakening understanding of Marrow is his growing disillusionment with bombing. Early in the war he had "thought of the enemy as a pickle barrel," but the more he learns about the realities of bombing the more disturbed he gets. He starts having nightmares about his victims below, "a crowd of innocents with upturned Picasso faces," where he sees himself in the crowd as one of the victims and at the same time in the sky as one of the perpetrators. By his twenty-fourth mission he has come to associate the sounds of exploding bombs with the end of civilization. By the time of this great Schweinfurt raid Boman's twin crises, his

new understanding of Marrow and revulsion with bombing, have joined in his mind as one.

"I had a despairing view of the world and of what men were making of it.... There would never be peace so long as there were men with Marrow's taint."³⁸

The movie version of *The War Lover* came out in 1962 and by this time the cultural climate was more open to assaults on the image of air power but still the movie studio held back somewhat. The film version was not altered as dramatically from its literary original as was *The Hunters*, but it lost much of Hersey's anti-air power tone. For example, the co-pilot, renamed Bolland in the film, does not struggle with the ethics of bombing. The image of bombing is also transformed from the tradition of Douhet found in the novel, to the tradition of ACTS as when a strike photo reveals that one squadron bombing through broken overcast scored ten direct hits on the targeted submarine pens. Even *Twelve O'clock High* did not claim bombing was that accurate. The movie is mildly anti-war and by extension anti-air power, but the message is confined to the lone misfit who loves killing too much, in this case the psychotic pilot, who in the movie is named Rickson. Daphne quickly sees that Rickson loves war like her former lover, who is said to have been a paratrooper, not an RAF pilot, but she does not suggest that he is part of a larger force that perpetuates wars. Everyone knows Rickson should be grounded, including Rickson's superiors, who appear competent and dedicated, but they reply with resignation that he's a great pilot who gets the job done and that wars need a few individuals who are willing to kill. In the end the crew is lucky to survive when Rickson's megalomania burns out and, rather than admit defeat, dies in a fiery crash.³⁹

By the beginning of the sixties, therefore, the novels *On the Beach* and especially *The War Lover* were reflective of a growing trend in popular culture that was willing to question the pervasive image of air power and were helping to create doubts about what air power might mean for the future of the human race. The movie industry, as had been the case with *The Hunters*, had not gone as far in critiquing air power as the novels had, but these later movies had presented images that might have been unheard of in the late forties or early fifties. The fact that this same mid- to late fifties period was also the period of magazine articles idolizing SAC and of movies like *Strategic Air Command* and *Bombers B-52* should serve as a reminder that not everyone agreed with the depictions of Salter and Hersey. Still, the works considered thus far in this chapter indicate that there was a segment in society who questioned the air power image and were finding an increasingly powerful voice in popular culture to present their doubts. This of course meant that more people were thus exposed to an alternate image of air power than the one they had been hearing almost exclusively up through the mid-fifties. The situation changed dramatically in the early-sixties, however, for a series of books appeared that launched the most severe attacks on air power ever in postwar popular culture, and most of them were turned into movies that were as severe or more so than the original novels.

A NEW IMAGE IN THE SKY: EARLY SIXTIES AND AIR POWER AS THREAT

The increasing level of concern over air power from the mid-fifties on was a part of the larger growing concern over nuclear weapons. A survey taken only months after Sputnik showed that 75% of those surveyed felt hydrogen bombs would be used against

America in any future world war and that such attacks would kill 70% of the population. Fueled by such sentiments, the anti-nuclear movement grew dramatically through the late fifties and peaked around 1963. Surveying titles listed in *Reader's Guide to Periodic Literature*, Spencer Weart reports that anti-nuclear articles rose dramatically in the late fifties and reached a peak in the early sixties. Because of the intimate connection between nuclear weapons and the dominant image of air power, the anti-nuclear movement became inextricably intertwined with the growing doubts about air power. The twin heightened concerns even became a factor in the 1964 Presidential election, for many saw Republican candidate Barry Goldwater, a reserve Air Force general and staunch air power supporter, as "nuke-happy." Some pundits went so far as to twist his campaign slogan, "In Your Heart You Know He's Right," to "In Your Heart You Know He Might." It is not surprising then that the early sixties saw a significant escalation in the tenor and popularity of attacks on the air power image. The changing public attitude was not complete. The same survey that found such concern about nuclear war also found that 60% of those surveyed felt that America should continue making nuclear weapons. Positive depictions such as *A Gathering of Eagles* continued, and some magazine articles still highlighted SAC's mission, but as we have seen even these reflect a changed attitude. The new wave of anti-air power works appearing in popular culture, though, represent the highest level of anti-air power sentiment since the end of World War II and in turn helped erode public faith in air power still further.⁴⁰

The first of the new generation of attacks was Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* published in 1961. Using the media of farce and satire Heller sets his Cold War concerns into the world of a B-25 bomb group in World War II Italy. If *The War Lover* is the photographic negative image of *Twelve O'clock High*, then *Catch-22* is its demented nightmare version. Heller had been a B-25 bombardier in Italy during World War II who flew sixty combat missions but his novel is not a loony memoir of his experiences during the war. Writing during the Korean War, Heller said that he had in mind the next one, World War III, and he waited for a more favorable cultural climate before publishing his work. A complex and allegorical story, *Catch-22* has numerous levels of meaning, and as each level plumbs deeper meanings, the novel presents increasingly frightful images of air power. A best-seller, the book sold over 5 million copies by 1970, and was made into a disappointing movie that same year. The novel quickly became a classic in American literature, thus ensuring that Heller's images of air power would live on for generations.⁴¹

Even a superficial reading of *Catch-22* presents a highly damaging attack on air power's image. As opposed to the image of airmen throughout the fifties as dedicated and trustworthy, Heller's AAF seems an insanely inverted world where the most despicable acts are perceived as normal. Group commander Colonel Cathcart has his men bomb an Italian village for no other reason than obtaining good strike photos, because he is convinced that civilian targets yield the best bomb patterns. Mess officer Milo Minderbinder starts out trading government property on the black market and expands his operation until the entire AAF is integrated into his corporation M & M Enterprises. His corporate motto, "What's good for M & M Enterprises is good for the country," is an obvious parody of

former head of General Motors and Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson's "What's good for General Motors is good for the country" and ties air power into the notion of the Military-Industrial Complex. Minderbinder even makes a deal with the Luftwaffe to bomb his own airfield in exchange for buying his excess products.⁴²

Other characters are no better. Some appear pathetic, as in Squadron Commander Major Major who is so afraid of his responsibilities he jumps out his office window whenever anyone comes in. Others appear subject to bizarre delusions of grandeur, as in General Peckem, a Special Service Corps commander who schemes throughout the novel to bring every bomb group in the AAF under his command. Every character exhibits some form of abnormal behavior, but the harmless ones fall victim to the dangerous ones as they destroy everything that stands in the way of their schemes. Indeed the only "heroes" often appear the most crazy of all but they are heroic because they escape. One pilot, Orr, ditches his plane on every mission as he practices for his escape and finally after yet another ditching paddles a liferaft all the way to Sweden. Yossarian, the main character, fights the system throughout the novel trying to avoid combat and in the end, inspired by Orr's example, sets off on his own escape to Sweden.⁴³

On a deeper level, though, air power appears as a malevolent evil. For one thing, as H. Bruce Franklin observes, Heller twists the oft heard claim that bombing won World War II into an image that bombing won the war for the "enemy," the enemy being all the corrupt, conniving, and grasping people who use the Air Force for their own perverted ends.⁴⁴ This of course should not be taken literally, but as a reflection of Heller's view, shared by other air power critics at the time, that in pushing their revolutionary image air

power advocates had placed in preeminence a military mindset, strategic nuclear air power, that threatened to obliterate everything in the name of saving America from Communism. Second, Heller dwells on the image of the depersonalization that the airmen are in inflicting on the world. Representative of this is the death of Snowden, a B-25 gunner killed on a bombing mission. Throughout the story Heller introduces more and more of “Snowden’s secret” as Yossarian comes to realize, along with the reader, the significance of how Snowden dies. When the details are finally revealed near the end, Yossarian bandages the wrong wound, only to find out too late that Snowden has been eviscerated by a piece of flak. The truth then dawns on Yossarian: all that is vital to humanity is pouring out of the wound inflicted by the new order just as Snowden’s vital organs spill out of his wound onto the aircraft floor. “He gazed down despondently at the grim secret Snowden had spilled all over the messy floor. It was easy to read the message in his entrails.... The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was Snowden’s secret.”⁴⁵

What salvation was there for Heller if air power was actually damnation? His picture was not reassuring. For Orr and Yossarian it was escape to a place far enough away that they were out of the airmen’s reach. But this was only individual salvation for the threat still remains. As Yossarian says when told that his running away may actually help the schemers succeed, “Let the bastards thrive, for all I care, since I can’t do a thing to stop them but embarrass them by running away.” For everyone else all Heller could offer was to try to find the courage to persevere, like the chaplain who could not muster the courage to even believe in God but who, buoyed by Orr’s example, finally resolves that he will persevere against the Colonel Cathcarts and the General Peckams.⁴⁶ Not

everyone caught these higher levels of meaning, and the humor might have kept others from taking even the more obvious meanings too seriously, but *Catch-22* injected at least a note of cynicism into the popular culture image of air power, and in many people's imaginations it dealt a severe blow to the notion of air power as a redeeming force.

A more serious and dramatic attack on air power was *Fail-Safe* written in 1962 by two political science professors, Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler. Published the same month of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the novel benefited from contemporary fears of nuclear war. It became not only a best-seller, selling over two million copies, it also was the only nuclear-related novel to make the top ten list of best-sellers for a given year. The novel remained on the *New York Times* best-sellers list for 31 weeks, and was chosen as a Book-of-the-Month selection. In another reflection that changed attitudes toward air power were becoming more widespread, *Fail-Safe* was serialized by a magazine that had done so much to lionize SAC throughout the fifties, *The Saturday Evening Post*.⁴⁷ The plot centered on SAC's Positive Control system, the so-called "Fail Safe" system, that relays orders for nuclear bombers to attack the Soviet Union. In the novel the system culminates in a "Black Box" in the bomber's cockpit. After the bombers are launched a light is supposed to illuminate indicating to the crew that they are to strike their targets. Because of a faulty condenser in a "Fail-Safe Activating Mechanism" at SAC headquarters an attack indication is sent to six bombers, one of which reaches and bombs Moscow. To atone for the disaster and avert a Soviet counter-attack the President, a thinly-veiled representation of John F. Kennedy, orders a SAC bomber to bomb New York City.⁴⁸

This is not a story like *On the Beach* where air power is only tangentially implicated in the disaster. For Burdick and Wheeler airmen are the disaster. They have been entrusted with machines of infinite destruction and they have entrusted machines with determining when to unleash that destruction. More important, though, the airmen have themselves become machines, unthinking, unfeeling, incapable of understanding anything but the linear logic of nuclear warfare and its dictates. In describing the training SAC crewmembers undergo to ensure they attack or refrain from attacking as ordered, the authors state, "The tests, the indoctrinations, the training - all were designed to convert normal American boys into automatons." The most graphic representation of the "automated" SAC crewmember is the commander of the group of attacking bombers, Colonel Grady. The authors' description of him bears this out: "He was an automated man.... There was only flesh and bone; there was no heart. There was intellect, but it lay inert, unmotivated by emotion." The culmination of the machine motif comes when Grady refuses to obey a direct order from the President, coming to him by radio, to abort his attack and return to base. Arguing that he is not authorized to receive orders once past his fail-safe point, Grady cannot adapt to situations that fall outside his rigid training.⁴⁹

The Air Force objected to the premise of the novel, but as with their reaction to Salter's *The Hunters*, the airmen did not seem to catch the deeper implications of the charges made about air power's inherent danger. Assuming the attack by Burdick and Wheeler was directed against SAC's system, the Air Force defended the system and missed entirely the message that the danger of air power was in the people who made up the system. A memorandum prepared by Colonel A.A. Arnhym, Special Assistant to

General Thomas Power, Commander of SAC, epitomizes the official Air Force response. Arnhym argued that the authors did not understand the system. There were no "Black Boxes" like the novel described, and any order to attack had to come from the President and was relayed verbally in an encoded message that then had to be checked by multiple members of every crew on every aircraft. Since the problems that arose in the novel could not arise in SAC's system, the system *was* safe. Nowhere does Arnhym seem to recognize that the authors saw SAC's unthinking faith in the system, the very sort of faith he himself was evincing, as the real danger.⁵⁰

Others came to the Air Force's defense and while they focused on the reliability of SAC's people as well as its system, they flatly rejected any notion that America's nuclear air power could inadvertently or inappropriately bring the world to ruin. For example, in 1963 Donald Robinson wrote a reassuring article for *This Week Magazine* that *Reader's Digest* reprinted in its pages. Robinson related in great detail the various aspects of the Positive Control system and with each facet he emphasized that no mistake was possible. He also outlined SAC's efforts to ensure that no one "madman" or even several working together could possibly launch a nuclear attack. As with the SAC articles of the previous decade Robinson showers SAC with fulsome praise, but his total dismissal of annihilation by mistake reinforced the image that the airmen accepted the hair-triggered apocalypse that Burdick and Wheeler attacked.⁵¹ Another major effort was Sy Bartlett's film, *A Gathering of Eagles*. Emanating from his conversations with LeMay that *Fail-Safe* would erode the public's faith in SAC, Bartlett showcased SAC's Positive Control system. Various scenes showing procedures in the SAC command post, activities in a Wing

command post, and crewmembers decoding alert messages reassured the public that SAC was in constant control of all its wings and aircraft at all times. But other images of airmen knocking themselves out for a commander they hate and despite the effects on their families actually reinforced the Burdick and Wheeler image of SAC automatons.⁵²

In 1964 Max Youngstein turned *Fail-Safe* into a movie that followed the novel almost to the letter. Youngstein was a member of an anti-nuclear group known as the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, or SANE, that formed in the wake of Sputnik, and he actively pursued the film rights using his like-mindedness with the authors as a bargaining lever. Youngstein did add some features to the movie. One gripping, if implausible scene added to the image of the SAC automaton. After Grady refuses to listen to the President's order to break off the attack, SAC headquarters puts Grady's wife on the radio and she hysterically pleads with him to return, but to even this the unbending pilot turns a deaf ear. The other major addition comes after the President tells the Premier that New York will be bombed. Reinforcing Youngstein's disarmament views the President lectures the Premier that both countries built the system that caused the disaster and now both sides must work together to destroy that system. Not surprisingly, the Air Force refused to help with production, which hurt the film's visual authenticity. But since the book had raised such controversy over its less-than-authentic presentation, theater-goers could hardly have expected to see an accurate depiction of Air Force flying. And go to the theater they did, for in its first three months the film grossed \$1.8 million. Patrons undoubtedly went hoping for the same gripping drama found in the book and when they

did go millions more saw the disturbing images Burdick and Wheeler had presented about the nature of air power.⁵³

Probably the most notorious chapter in this period's assault on the image of air power came with Stanley Kubrick's macabre masterpiece, *Dr. Strangelove*, which came out in 1964. The movie was based on an obscure novel written in 1958 by Peter George titled *Red Alert*. Kubrick, who had already made one anti-war movie with his 1957 film *Paths of Glory*, wanted to make a movie about inadvertent nuclear war, and in 1961 he discovered George's novel. Deciding that *Red Alert*'s serious and technical tone would work better as a nightmarish comedy, he enlisted George and screenwriter Terry Southern in his effort to create the script and the three also collaborated on a novelization of the film, also titled *Dr. Strangelove*. The two novels did not sell well for they were mere shadows of the film version. Thus in a reversal of the late-fifties trend where movies did not press their anti-air power message as far as the novels, the film version of *Dr. Strangelove* presented the strongest attack on the airmen and was seen by more people. The film was the fourteenth favorite film of 1964 and grossed over \$4.4 million.⁵⁴

Red Alert was a classic example of the modern version of the "future war" novel that had been so popular before World War I, and as such it conveys a generally positive view of air power. This characterization is not surprising because George had been an RAF pilot.⁵⁵ In the preparedness tradition of "future war" literature George's work sees the "missile gap" as the ultimate cause of the near-disaster of which he writes, for the general who launches the bombers to attack the Soviet Union does so to start a war before the first Soviet missiles are operational and while America has a temporary advantage. As

opposed to the insane “General Jack D. Ripper” of the film version, a quite sane General Quinten believes that America’s avowed policy never to launch a first-strike leaves it at a disadvantage which, once the Soviets have large numbers of missiles makes it only a matter of time before America is destroyed. For this reason, sensing a brief window of opportunity, he launches an attack which he hopes will be followed by an all-out American nuclear attack.⁵⁶ The positive view of air power is borne out not only by the image of bombers saving America from eventual destruction, but also in the novel’s depiction of American air power as technically sophisticated and its airmen as motivated and highly proficient. The novel ends on a strong preparedness note. When the disaster is narrowly averted both the President and the Soviet ambassador agree that peace will only be ensured once both sides are armed with ICBMs because the threat of mutual annihilation will keep each side from launching an attack.⁵⁷

Kubrick saw great potential for farce in George’s novel and in the process of reworking the story no institution or person escapes his attack, but air power clearly emerges as one of the chief culprits. The President, the Soviets, the Army, and academic deterrence theorists all comes in for a good roasting. Even the film’s lone hero, RAF Group Captain Lionel Mandrake, often appears to be a twit as when he ceremoniously comes to attention and orders General Ripper to give him the recall code. Arguably, though, the characters most memorable for their lunacy are Air Force officers. General Jack D. Ripper orders his planes to attack in order to foil what he thinks is a Communist plot to undermine America by polluting its people’s “precious bodily fluids.” Major “King” Kong, pilot of the only B-52 that fails to receive the recall signal, rides the bomb

out of the bomb bay whooping like a cowboy riding a bronco. Air Force General and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff “Buck” Turgidson, after learning of the Soviet’s “Doomsday Device,” stakes out the ground rules of the new Cold War by declaring “Mister President, we must not allow a mineshaft gap!”⁵⁸

Like Burdick and Wheeler, Kubrick sees the danger of air power as more than just a failure in the system starting nuclear war. Once again the threat comes from the people who populate the air power world, but in *Dr. Strangelove* the problem is not that airmen are robots. Rather, airmen are so fanatically wedded to their faith in air power and their paranoid view of a world filled with threats which they feel only nuclear bombing can meet that they threaten to plunge the rest of humanity into oblivion. Ripper’s paranoia stems from his own sexual fixations, and his solution is to unleash the bombers. Kong so relishes the thought of nuclear warfare that he personalizes it as “nuclear combat toe-to-toe with the Ruskies.” Even after learning that the “Doomsday Device” will destroy all life on earth if so much as one bomber reaches its target, Turgidson cannot help reveling in the capability of the bomber to “always get through.” Standing in the war room, his arms outstretched imitating a B-52 flying at low altitude, he exclaims, “If the pilot’s good see, I mean if he’s really sharp, he can barrel that baby in so low, you ought to see it sometime, its a sight! A big plane like a ‘52! Vroom! Its jet exhaust frying chickens in a barnyard!”

The worst part of the film’s depiction of air power is that there is no escaping these mad airmen. Even the oft touted virtue of the dedicated SAC personnel becomes a vice. When all efforts have failed to stop the bomber an onboard malfunction prevents it from releasing its weapons and the world seems to have been granted a reprieve. The

“heroic” dedication of Kong, though, solves the problem and the bomb is dropped on target. But even the looming death of all life for the next 100 years does not shake the airmen from their fixations. After hearing of the idea of setting up underground cities so that a few Americans can live on and repopulate the country Turgidson urges continued reliance on air power in the new era. Counseling the President he states, “I think we oughta look at this from the military point of view. I mean, supposing the Ruskies stashed away some big bombs, see, and we didn’t. When they come out in a hundred years they could take over.”

As with *Fail-Safe*, the Air Force refused to help with the production but that did not preclude Kubrick from making a movie that was quite popular. Kubrick did request Air Force assistance but the depiction of their Positive Control system precluded any help. Undeterred Kubrick used models for the flight scenes and his imagination for much of the rest. As with *Fail-Safe* realistic depictions of Air Force procedures did not really matter, especially since Kubrick’s medium was humor. The humorous element, though, may have backfired. The film was very popular. Two New York City theaters broke opening day attendance records, and long lines withstood freezing weather to see the film, but some observers claim that movie-goers were too busy laughing to take the movie as seriously as Kubrick had hoped. Still, its anti-air power images became fixed features in popular culture. To this day people ask B-52 pilots if they keep a Stetson on board as Kong did. More important, however, *Dr. Strangelove* along with *Fail-Safe* marked the complete abandonment of any hesitancy in Hollywood to portray air power in a negative light.⁵⁹

Yet another indication of changed attitudes in the early to mid-sixties is the writings of some erstwhile air power advocates. Some, like Sy Bartlett and Ira Eaker remained actively in the fight to the end. Others, though, while not necessarily becoming anti-air power, showed signs that their thinking about air power had changed along with society. One such example is William Bradford Huie. After a brief stint as a notorious air power advocate in the late forties, Huie dropped from the air power scene after the Revolt of the Admirals. He went on to other causes, most notably civil rights and military injustice. In this latter area he wrote *The Execution of Private Slovik* in 1954 and *The Hero of Iwo Jima* in 1962, but another work in 1964 indicates an evolving attitude toward air power. After World War II rumors circulated around the world that the pilot of the *Enola Gay*, Paul Tibbets, had gone insane or had become an alcoholic or a criminal. Those rumors had their basis in the story of Major Claude Eatherly, a pilot in the 509th Composite Group, who had flown the Hiroshima weather ship that determined where the first atomic bomb would be dropped. After the war Eatherly sunk into a life of drinking and petty crime. He later claimed his role in the “crime of Hiroshima” led to his actions and that the Air Force was persecuting him to keep him from sharing his guilty conscience with the world. At Eatherly’s request Huie wrote a book about the sorted affair.⁶⁰

Given Huie’s two most recent works on military injustice, one might have expected this story to be a denunciation of the Air Force. On the other hand, given Huie’s past as a rabid air power advocate one might have expected it to be a whitewash of the Air Force. What Huie actually wrote is an even-handed account where he lets the facts speak for themselves. He denounces neither the Air Force nor Eatherly. Eatherly appears as a

glory seeker who brought his mistakes upon himself. He was disappointed that he did not get to drop one of the atomic bombs and later tried to glorify what role he did play. After the war he wanted to stay in the Air Force but was thrown out in 1947 for cheating on an exam. He later signed on as a mercenary hired to smuggle guns into Cuba for a right-wing group plotting a coup and then he was to bomb Havana when the coup broke out. Caught and arrested for this crime he spent some time in jail after which he drifted in and out of various jobs and the Veterans Administration's mental health facilities where he was diagnosed with mild stress disorders. In what appeared to be both an effort to stay out of jail and another attempt to gain glory he seized upon the story of a guilt complex for his role in Hiroshima and played up to various anti-nuclear groups around the world.⁶¹

What makes *The Hiroshima Pilot* seem to be a transitional work is both its neutral stance toward the Air Force and works that Huie wrote later in his career beyond the period of this study. In 1975 he wrote *In the Hours of Night*, a novel based on events of the late forties. The story embodies Huie's belief late in life that after World War II the U.S. should have led the world toward universal disarmament under an international peacekeeping force.⁶² This is a sharp departure from the man who in 1949 warned the Soviet Union, "we can do to Russia, if Russia attacks us, what Rome did to Carthage." In forgetting that he had been one of the leading proponents of relying on a large nuclear armed Air Force, Huie's disassociation from air power seems to have become complete. This new conviction remained with Huie for the rest of his life, for around the time of his death he told *Contemporary Authors* that he was working on a story titled *How America Failed Mankind*. Huie called this story, "the most important story of the twentieth

century, for it is the story of the men who made the atomic bomb and who...worked desperately to prevent the bomb from becoming a national weapon.”⁶³

In another example, Fletcher Knebel, author of several pro-air power articles for *Look* during the fifties, gained considerable notoriety in 1962 with a novel that portrayed the Air Force, along with the rest of the military, in a very bad light. Earlier, in 1960, he had joined with Charles W. Bailey II in writing a journalistic history of the development and use of the atomic bomb in World War II, *No High Ground*. The account was an even-handed treatment of the events and included a section examining the effects on the people of Hiroshima, but it also detailed some of the negative consequences of the bombing and the troubled consciences that had arisen since 1945. Its somber and uneasy ending reflected the growing divisions on the subject of nuclear weapons and air power within American society at the time of its publication.⁶⁴ Two years later Knebel and Bailey again collaborated on a book that was as big a shock to the military as *Fail-Safe* had been to the Air Force that same year. The book was *Seven Days in May*.

The story of an attempted military coup, *Seven Days in May* fell equally hard on all the services, but the leader of the plot is a charismatic Air Force general who is also Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General James Mattoon Scott, whom the authors describe as “a blend of the best of Eisenhower and MacArthur,” was a fighter pilot and an ace in both World War II and Korea and he had brilliantly commanded all air assets in a war in Iran against “The Communists” that had only recently ended unfavorably for the U.S.⁶⁵ The prominent role played by Scott put the Air Force in the forefront for the onus in this novel, but air power in general got a black eye because of the main reason for the

coup attempt. The new president, Jordan Lyman, used the international fallout from the Iran War to negotiate an international nuclear disarmament treaty which the Pentagon had almost universally opposed. Worried that the Soviets would cheat on the treaty and attack the U.S. once America had destroyed all its nuclear weapons, Scott orchestrates a plot that involves virtually every branch of the military. Once again airmen see air power as the only solution to international tension and are willing to resort to the most extreme measures rather than relinquish their vision.

There are several redeeming military characters, chief among them being the hero of the story, Marine Colonel "Jiggs" Casey who uncovers and helps foil the plot. Another military figure who remains loyal and plays a key role in bringing down the conspirators is a top Air Force leader General Rutkowski, commander of Air Defense Command. Also Admiral Palmer, Chief of Naval Operations, refuses to go along with the plot, but these characters cannot erase the stigma the novel placed on the entire military.

The book quickly became a best-seller, remaining on the best-seller list for 49 weeks, and was soon made into a movie. The movie version dropped the Iran War motif and made the disarmament treaty the sole reason for the plot. It also strengthened the role of Scott, played by Burt Lancaster. For example, the plot is foiled only after Scott had already launched the coup. All of these changes made its anti-air power message stronger, though it retained its negative image of all the services. Columbia pursued the project and inquired about military support, and when they were turned down they appealed to the White House but to no avail. Columbia dropped the project and Paramount bought it but did not pursue Pentagon support. Instead, the director, John Frankenheimer, used

subterfuge to film the few shots with military backgrounds that he needed. Military help was not critical to the movie and the final product was none the worse for not having it, for the film proved quite popular at the box office.⁶⁶

William Wister Haines, author of *Command Decision* and co-screenwriter for the film *One Minute to Zero*, did not change his views quite so much as had Huie and Knebel. In 1964 he published *Target*, a novel about World War II intelligence gathering. Haines returns to an old theme, for his plot involves two intelligence analysts who go into recently liberated Strasbourg to gather information on a factory that had made parts for German aircraft. Their goal is to discover where the Germans were building the ME-262. Once again Haines credits allied bombing with gaining air superiority, and once again the new German jet threatens to regain air superiority and turn back the course of the war. There are occasional references to how effective American bombing had been, as when the Strasbourg factory owner tells Brett, the American agent, "Your bombing had almost extinguished piston plane manufacture on the eve of the Allied invasion and the Russian summer offensive." Again the factory owner states: "Your bombing last winter brought German aircraft production almost to a standstill."⁶⁷

The novel, though, also betrays a strong undercurrent of cynicism toward daylight precision bombing that stands in stark contrast to the depiction in *Command Decision*. In a London staff meeting, for example, the head of the target selection committee, frustrated at their inability to determine where the factories are located, comments, "don't take it too seriously. We've still got plenty of hospitals and orphanages to prang." And of Brett,

Haines states, “he had read Douhet, Seversky and the propaganda of the Army Air Corps.” An infantry colonel asks Brett:

Well, I'll hand it to you flyboys... you'd won this war three times before I hit Africa and twice before I hit Marseille.... There's just one thing I would like to know: with all this victory through air power.... What are us dogfaces doing out here in the mud?

The most recurring theme, though, is the frequent references to the heavy toll in casualties and property caused by inaccurate American bombing. Throughout his journey across France Brett encounters the scars and the animosity generated by “precision” bombing, particularly in Strasbourg.⁶⁸

Not all air power advocates drifted away, some clung to the “true faith,” but they were invariably relegated to the fringes as they sounded more out of step with society. Spaatz ended his literary career just as the new decade was starting. His last *Newsweek* column ran on 17 April 1961 and he went out arguing for the B-70 bomber.⁶⁹ The next year Ira Eaker began a column that was carried by the Copley News service for 18 years and offered to as many as 1400 newspapers each week. Most of these newspapers, though, were small city and local papers. In 1963 Eaker claimed his column was carried by “over 31 papers weekly,” thus in reality Eaker was something of a “voice crying in the wilderness.” He continued to support air power topics like the B-70, but he also wrote on anti-Communism and pro-business topics, and with the growing anti-war and anti-military sentiments in the wake of America’s escalating involvement in Vietnam he often wrote to defend the war and the other services.⁷⁰ Eaker did get one shot at taking his air power message to the “big-time.” In 1963 Arthur Godfrey was a frequent guest host on the

Tonight Show, and he and LeMay conspired to get Eaker on the show as a guest on 6 June 1963. Eaker sent ahead of his appearance a list of questions for Godfrey to ask him on the show. The questions covered the range of topics from national defense to the state of bomber capability so it appears he had ample opportunity to put his air power message before a large audience. Compared to the old days, though, this was small opportunity.⁷¹

Another example was Nathan Twining. After retiring as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1960 Twining wrote “a hard look at U.S. military policy and strategy” as the sub-title of his *Neither Liberty Nor Safety*, published in 1966, proclaimed. An analysis of American military and diplomatic strategy throughout the Cold War, Twining’s views might have been mainstream in the early fifties but in the changed atmosphere of the mid-sixties they were extremist. Pointing to a “fear psychosis” desperate to believe the “Russian Bear had become a fun-loving, happily domesticated beast,” Twining attempted to rally the American public to remain staunch in the face of nuclear dangers. In his attitudes toward strategic bombing, for example, he ascribed opposition to “an instinctive moral objection to...the subjugation of civilian populations to the hazards of war” and then mocked such morality for preferring that the hazard be borne by young men in uniform on a far-off battlefield.⁷²

Curtis LeMay also remained true to the air power gospel, but here too the one-time paragon of America determination became a symbol of the reactionary fringe. Like Twining, LeMay tried to get America to “buck-up” and accept the sacrifices of a hard line in the fight against global Communism. In his 1965 memoirs, for example, he offered his oft-quoted formula for ending the war in Vietnam: “My solution to the problem would be

to tell them frankly that they've got to draw in their horns and stop their aggression, or we're going to bomb them back into the Stone Age." Such sentiments were out of step with the predominant views, however, and he drifted farther into the outfield of political and military debates. No better example of this exists than the fact that the man who was once lauded as America's best hope for peace and security ended up as the running-mate of an extremist third party candidate in the 1968 Presidential elections.⁷³

By 1965, then, the cultural views toward air power had gone through a dramatic evolution. The air power advocates' popular culture campaign had not come to a complete halt but it was a mere shadow of its former self. Some advocates had changed their tone considerably, while others had drifted away to other pursuits. More important, those that remained found their message relegated to the outskirts of the new cultural debate. Where once air power advocates had promised quick, easy, and painless victory through air power, now they lectured Americans on the need to accept great sacrifices and suffering. Their message had not really changed in its fundamental premise, though. What had changed was society's response to their message. Fears of nuclear devastation had risen to new heights since 1957 and this prompted many to reexamine their faith in air power. When they did so they found a long line of critics raising increasingly sharp attacks on the image of air power and the old faith could not stand up under the assault. With the old faith gone and fears of nuclear war reaching a new high point, the exhortations of LeMay and Twining sounded to many like something out of *Catch-22*, or worse, *Dr. Strangelove*.

1. John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946, 1985); Hermann Hagedorn, *The Bomb That Fell on America*, revised ed., (New York: Associated Press, 1946, 1950); for information on the literary response to the atomic bomb, and for Mumford's article see Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, 284-87; for response to *Hiroshima* see David Sanders, *John Hersey* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), 14, 50.
2. Kennett, *History of Strategic Bombing*, chapter 4; Sherry, *Rise of American Air Power*, 33.
3. Weart, *Nuclear Fear*, 216-17, 241-42; Franklin, *War Stars*, 183.
4. "Jet Age Man," *Life* (6 December 1954): 141-53, see also editorials "Jet Age I: Advice to the Grounded," and "Jet Age II: Outlook for the Airman," same issue, 48; on 18 June 1956 *Life* devoted the entire issue to special "Air Age" features covering many topics of civil, commercial, and military aviation; for *Collier's* compare 25 December 1948 issue with 18 and 25 December 1953 issues.
5. See chapter 7; *Reader's Digest* played a conspicuous role in extolling the missile effort, and some of the articles printed in their pages include, George Barrett, "Visit to America's 'Earthstrip No. 1'" *Reader's Digest* (December 1957): 88-90; Corey Ford and James Perkins, "New Watch on the Rhine," *Reader's Digest* (September 1958): 117-20; and Wolfgang Langewiesche, "Canaveral - From the Cape to the Stars," *Reader's Digest* (June 1959): 114-20.
6. Weart, *Nuclear Fear*, 263-64.
7. James Atwater, "How the Modern Minuteman Guards the Peace," *Saturday Evening Post* (9 February 1963): 65-69.
8. Ward Taylor, *Roll Back the Sky* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1956), 53-55.
9. Ibid, 77-80, 111-17, 140.
10. Ibid, 141-42, 147-48, 244, 252.
11. Ibid, 150-52, 167-71.
12. Letter, 6 February 1956, Ellen McDonnell, with Twentieth Century-Fox, to Donald Baruch, Record Group 330, Entry 1006, Box 26, The Hunters folder, National Archives; Paris, *From Wright Brothers to Top Gun*, 190. Twentieth Century-Fox's claim that the book was published anonymously presents the dilemma of whether Salter was the author's real name. Paris attributes the book, without comment, to James Horowitz. *Contemporary Authors* contains a brief entry for James Salter but none for James Horowitz. The anonymity raised problems when the studio tried to purchase the film

rights and studio officials asked Baruch to write to the author, through his agent and publisher, promising that the Air Force would not try to determine his true identity.

13. James Salter, *The Hunters* (Harper & Brothers, 1956).
14. Ibid, 5, 136-42.
15. Ibid, 229-37.
16. Ibid, 172-78.
17. Dick Powell, prod., *The Hunters* (Hollywood: Twentieth Century-Fox, 1958).
18. Letter, 1 February 1956, Donald Baruch to Frank McCarthy, Director of Public Relations at Twentieth Century-Fox, and Story Synopsis, dated 30 September 1955 but which must be an error since the novel was not published until 1956, Record Group 330, Entry 1006, Box 26, The Hunters folder, National Archives.
19. Letter, 22 August 1956, Baruch to Anthony Muto, with Twentieth Century-Fox, and memo, 6 March 1957, Stockton B. Shaw, Air Force Pictorial Branch, to Baruch, both in Record Group 330, Entry 1006, Box 26, The Hunters folder, National Archives.
20. Message, 9 January 1958, Major Thomson to Chief, Air Force Office of Information Services, and Memo, 5 February 1958, Stockton Shaw to Baruch, both in Record Group 330, Entry 1006, Box 26, The Hunters folder, National Archives.
21. Memo, 13 February 1958, Stockton Shaw to Chief, Production Branch, Audio-Visual Division, DoD, and letter, 23 June 1958, Baruch to Frank McCarthy, Twentieth Century-Fox Director of Public Relations, both in Record Group 330, Entry 1006, Box 26, The Hunters folder, National Archives.
22. "Rental Potentials of 1960," *Variety* (4 January 1961): 47; Weart, *Nuclear Fear*, 217-19.
23. Nevil Shute, *On the Beach*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1957), 12, 89-90.
24. De Seversky, *Air Power: Key to Survival*, 158-59.
25. Shute, *On the Beach*, 93-95.
26. Ibid, 94.
27. Stanley Kramer, prod., *On the Beach* (Hollywood: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1959).
28. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, xvii; Weart, *Nuclear Fear*, 218, 320.

29. For literary views of this work see Sanders, *John Hersey*, 95-107, and Nancy L. Huse, *The Survival Tales of John Hersey* (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston Publishing, 1983), 101-10.

30. Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature*, 169.

31. John Hersey, *The War Lover* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 67, 82.

32. *Ibid*, 96, 381.

33. Huse, *The Survival Tales of John Hersey*, 105.

34. Hersey, *The War Lover*, 230-31, 303-04.

35. *Ibid*, 156-57.

36. *Ibid*, 381-82.

37. *Ibid*, 75-76.

38. *Ibid*, 17, 32, 59, 71, 102, 188.

39. Arthur Hornblow, Jr., prod., *The War Lover* (Burbank, Calif.: Columbia Pictures, 1962).

40. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 1552-53; Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, 352-56; Weart, *Nuclear Fear*, 184, 215-17, 241-50, 278, 301.

41. Franklin, *War Stars*, 119, 123; Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 270-73.

42. Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), 63-66, 252-54, 301, 318-23.

43. *Ibid*, 88-91, 97-98, 119, 316, 438-43.

44. Franklin, *War Stars*, 123-27.

45. Heller, *Catch-22*, 426-30, quote from 430.

46. *Ibid*, 441-42.

47. Weart, *Nuclear Fear*, 275; Arthur S. Ragen, "The Image of the Military as Portrayed in Three Novels Made Into Screenplays Since 1958: Reality Versus Fiction in the Depiction of an Image," (M.S. thesis, Boston University, 1964), 78.

48. Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler, *Fail-Safe* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 43-44, 279-80, 283-84.
49. *Ibid*, 154, 241-42, 251; Ragen, "The Image of the Military," 96-97.
50. Memo, 4 December 1962, Arnhym to Power, reprinted in Ragen, "The Image of the Military," 89-94.
51. Donald Robinson, "How Safe Is Fail-Safe?" *Reader's Digest* (May 1963): 91-94.
52. Bartlett, *A Gathering of Eagles*, see chapter 7 for a fuller discussion of this movie.
53. Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 195-201; Weart, *Nuclear Fear*, 275-77; "Big Rental Pictures of 1964," *Variety* (6 January 1965): 39.
54. "Big Rental Pictures of 1964," *Variety* (6 January 1965): 39; Franklin, *War Stars*, 185; Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 190-91, 194.
55. Peter George, *Dr. Strangelove* (Boston: Gregg Press, 1979), vii-x, the novel version of the film was first published in 1964 and this reprint edition includes an introductory analysis of the two novels and the film; for a study of the "future war" genre see chapter 2 and especially Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War*.
56. Peter George, *Red Alert* (New York: Ace Books, 1958), 38-40, 87-95.
57. *Ibid*, 190.
58. Stanley Kubrick, prod., *Dr. Strangelove, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Burbank, Calif.: Columbia, 1964).
59. Ragen, "The Image of the Military," 113-14, 129; Rubin, *Combat Films*, 195; Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 194-95.
60. William Bradford Huie, *The Hiroshima Pilot* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), 7-20, 23-25.
61. *Ibid*, 37-40, 50, 68-69, 71-76, 130-32.
62. William Bradford Huie, *In the Hours of Night* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1975).
63. William Bradford Huie, "The Facts Which Must Prevent War," *Reader's Digest* (January 1949): 25; *Contemporary Authors*, vol. 7, 238-39.
64. Fletcher Knebel and Charles W. Bailey II, *No High Ground* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960).

65. Fletcher Knebel and Charles W. Bailey II, *Seven Days in May* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 13, 33.
66. Edward Lewis and Kirk Douglas, prods., *Seven Days in May* (Hollywood: Paramount, 1964); "Big Rental Pictures of 1964," *Variety* (6 January 1965): 39; Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 202-05.
67. William Wister Haines, *Target* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), 191, 289.
68. *Ibid*, 6, 27, 82.
69. Carl Spaatz, "The Case for the B-70 in an Age of Missiles," *Newsweek* (17 April 1961): 34.
70. Parton, *Air Force Spoken Here*, 473-76; for reference to actual number of papers carrying Eaker's column see list of questions, no date, Eaker Papers, Box II: 68, Tonight Show Appearance folder, LOC; the Eaker Papers contain copies of most of Eaker's columns in Boxes II: 89-91.
71. Letters, 24 May 1963, Godfrey to Eaker; 28 May 1963, Eaker to Godfrey; 4 June 1963, Eaker to Bruce Cooper, NBC; and list of questions, no date, all in Eaker Papers, Box II: 68, Tonight Show Appearance folder, LOC.
72. Nathan F. Twining, *Neither Liberty Nor Safety: A Hard Look at U.S. Military Policy and Strategy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), xv, 195-96.
73. LeMay, *Mission With LeMay*, 565.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Air power's popular culture crusade was a unique and curious chapter in American military history. On one level air power was the result of an invention, the airplane. On another level, though, it was the product of widespread fascination with aviation and a faith stemming from this fascination that exhibited characteristics of religious devotion. It seems no coincidence that air power's era of domination in the American military structure began during a period of lingering enchantment with aviation and in an atmosphere of grave international danger. Likewise, the erosion of faith in salvation through air power seemed to coincide with the fading cultural fixation with the airplane as flying became commonplace and new wonders, like space travel, captured the public's imagination. In the interim, though, air power advocates reflected and exploited the love affair with the airplane in their effort to convert the nation to the gospel of air power.

Air power advocates had come a long way since the interwar era in winning widespread public support for their cause. Taking advantage of both the cultural fascination with aviation and the unprecedented public support for air power generated by World War II, they had used popular culture as a prominent part of their campaign to "make America an air power nation." Following a trail blazed by Billy Mitchell, they

shaped their faith in air power into a message that extolled air power's revolutionary potential and promised not only salvation from the dangers of war, but also a better tomorrow through air power. Placing their message in those forms of mass-media which many Americans turned to for entertainment and diversion, air power advocates made their image of air power a major part of the popular imagination's conception of security in a time of danger. Outside factors, especially the fear of Communist aggression and Soviet attack, aided air power advocates in gaining support for their cause, and thus they crafted their popular culture campaign to present air power, specifically strategic nuclear bombing, as the only adequate defense against the Communist threat. When other factors, such as the Korean War and interservice rivalry, challenged the image they hoped to instill in the public consciousness, air power advocates eluded the challenges and kept their image relatively intact. For a brief time that image, embodied by SAC, dominated the public's notion of national defense and security.

In the last half of the fifties, though, other challenges arose that weakened public faith in the air power advocates' image. New critics arose and cultural attitudes changed. Aviation was no longer the new and fascinating image it once had been, and from the mid-fifties on, writers emerged projecting a jaundiced view of air power. The change had only just begun, though, and these few early attacks were mild compared to later works. Significantly, when such works were turned into major motion pictures with big-name stars, the anti-air power message was considerably softened. Air power advocates also confused the institutional well-being of the Air Force with advancing their cause of air power. The biggest challenge, though, was the awakening fear of nuclear devastation

during the late fifties, a fear that rose sharply in the early sixties. Sputnik had shocked the nation in 1957, but so had the Soviets' explosion of an atomic bomb in 1949. Unlike the earlier crisis, however, many rejected the naive faith in air power and began to see air power itself as part of the larger problem. Recognizing the connection between public faith in air power and acceptance of nuclear warfare, critics of nuclear weapons advanced their cause through works in popular culture that tried to undermine that faith by presenting air power and the airmen as grave threats. Once again, these attacks on air power built slowly. The 1957 novel *On the Beach* implicated air power only indirectly and the 1959 film said even less. The works of the early sixties, though, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Fail-Safe*, and *Catch-22* for example, took on the image of air power directly. These new attacks were unique both because they would have been unheard of ten or fifteen years earlier and because they were so popular.

Between the declining fascination with aviation and recurring images of the "Mad Bomber," the American public rapidly lost that curious kind of faith that seemed to invest air power with almost mystical properties. The technological messianism that had led many to look to nuclear bombers for salvation from the threat of nuclear devastation was exorcized and popular imagination began to see the nuclear bomber for what it was, a brutal weapon that should be reserved for only the most brutal necessity. No longer did magazine articles proclaim in effusive prose that nuclear bombers were the answer to every military conflict. Even the 1963 film, *A Gathering of Eagles*, the last of the "SAC Trilogy," avoided most of the old images of revolutionary air power. Similarly, there was a new and more realistic attitude toward air power in popular imagination. People outside

the Air Force community ceased talking about "Air Power," or as it came to be called in Air Force circles, "Airpower," as if it were something bigger than the sum of its parts. Instead they envisioned it as a tool in the larger American military structure. The general public did not turn against air power completely. In a sense they accepted it as a facet of modern warfare, and the Air Force enjoyed generally as much support as did the Army and the Navy. An indication of the new public attitude is how outrageous and out of step with the times LeMay's proposed solution to the Vietnam dilemma sounded in 1965, and how naive it sounds today.

Technological messianism was not purged from the American consciousness, though, for it seems Americans still look to technology, and increasingly science, for salvation from complex problems. Such expectations require a simple-minded fascination with the technology in question. As aviation became less fascinating and people learned more about the complex problems of nuclear air power, the images of deliverance could no longer be maintained. Increasingly from the late fifties on, technological messianism seemed to move on to other wonders, particularly space flight in the sixties, and perhaps computers today. Similarly, enthusiasm for flying has not disappeared entirely. Crowds still flock to air shows across the country where aerial demonstration teams like the Air Force's Thunderbirds and the Navy's Blue Angels are a big hit, and every year thousands join the Air Force hoping for a chance to become pilots. The big difference since the early sixties is that few outside air power circles seriously believe that air power can single-handedly handle any military situation that arises. Aviation still retained vestiges of its old

romantic imagery in popular culture today but generally such images have reverted to a simpler time, hence the recurring romantic motif of the biplane and the World War I ace.

Thus on the eve of America's deepening involvement in the war in Vietnam there was a significant gulf between what the Air Force and air power advocates believed air power could do and what the public was willing to support. Many in the Air Force in 1965 agreed with LeMay's strategy for winning the war. Latter-day air power advocates point to the massive bombing raids on Hanoi during the Linebacker II operation in December 1972, which hastened the signing of the peace accord in early 1973, as a vindication of modern air power. In fact, to this day there is a strong belief among Vietnam veterans in the B-52 community that the Linebacker II raids ended the war, and they claim that if Johnson had unleashed the bombers in 1965 or 1966 the way Nixon had in 1972, the same results would have obtained sooner.¹ Few Americans supported such a policy. Long before 1972 air power had become a widespread symbol of the excessive and counterproductive means being used to prosecute the war. For many Americans air power in Vietnam came to symbolize bombed-out villages, widespread defoliation, and jets fruitlessly hunting lone snipers hidden in triple-canopy jungles, and the public generally found these images disturbing. Clearly the public had widely repudiated the sentiments expressed in 1955 by Frank Harvey when he extolled the image of bombers using nuclear weapons to stamp out brushfire wars in all corners of the globe.²

Air power's previous image as the epitome of high technology warfare actually came back to haunt air power advocates during the Vietnam War. Hard pressed to explain why the world's greatest air force could not defeat an under-developed country

like North Vietnam after they had proclaimed for so many decades that air power could win any war, all air power advocates could do was complain that they were not allowed to conduct the air war the way they wanted, and they called for more bombing. With wide segments of the public already questioning the level of aerial destruction, claims that air power could only work against a minor power like North Vietnam if the bombing effort was escalated did not enhance the public's faith in air power's ability to win wars without inflicting unacceptable levels of destruction and massive civilian casualties. To many Americans it seemed that this high technology weapon could only win by sinking to uncivilized levels of barbarism.

The use of air power in Vietnam was hardly the only controversial element of that war and the Air Force was not the only government agency to draw fire from those who opposed the military's methods. Still, on the eve of America's most controversial war, air power had experienced a rapid fall from grace in the eyes of the American public. Furthermore, air power advocates had not yet adjusted to the new public attitudes toward their cause or their favored methods. The gulf between the airmen and the American public would widen during the war and plunge the image of air power to its lowest point in public esteem since the 1930s. That image would slowly regain some ground, but it never approached the level of public trust enjoyed in the mid-fifties. Even the dramatic results of the air war and the sight of precision guided munitions flying down elevator shafts during the Gulf War could not awaken the old faith in the preeminence of air power. Significantly, works in popular culture since Vietnam that portray air power in a positive

light, such as Tom Clancy's novels, show air power serving in a crucial, but supporting role along side the Army and Navy.

America's fixation with air power after World War II was a passing phenomenon and its reoccurrence seems hard to imagine. The key ingredient in the cultural recipe that led to faith in air power - a society so fascinated with the sudden reality of human flight as to ascribe messianistic properties to the airplane - was a simplistic and innocent public consciousness that will never come again. Familiarity has not bred contempt toward the airplane, but it has bred nonchalance. Americans are so far removed from this naive frame of mind today that it seems hard to believe that people once expected salvation from a machine. Reading some of the exhortations of air power advocates from the late forties or the general interest magazine articles about SAC from the mid-fifties generates feelings of amusement today, and even some measure of embarrassment. Still, to understand the rise of air power after World War II to a level of dominance in America's military structure, one must understand the cultural attachment to air power, how air power advocates reflected that attachment, and how they used it to build an air power empire based on strategic nuclear bombing.

In a larger sense, though, the postwar air power phenomenon also illustrates the importance of images in shaping any society's attitudes toward the military and toward warfare in general. Torn between conflicting emotions, fearing war but fearing attack, suspicious of militarism but venerating its heroes, every society has complex images of war and its own military structure that shape its attitudes toward military policy. Even the most authoritarian government cannot ignore these public attitudes completely.

Recognizing this, every branch of America's military structure has long conducted its own campaign to influence public opinion and to shape its own image in popular imagination. Invariably these campaigns have included works placed in popular culture by each branch's advocates and these campaigns would make fruitful areas of study for future historians. No branch, however, has enjoyed the success that air power advocates enjoyed after World War II. Not only did they successfully tap the power of America's faith in the airplane and use that power to help lead the Air Force to the premier position in national defense, they also helped convince average Americans, for a short time at least, that they should rely on that which they feared most - nuclear air power. This then is the ultimate testimony to the power of images to shape popular attitudes toward warfare. Fearing nuclear attack, Americans might have shunned nuclear weapons outright or put their faith in more direct forms of protection such as air defense. Instead, thanks in large part to the long parade of images advanced by air power advocates, they put inordinate faith in the very instrument that threatened their destruction, hoping desperately that Soviet fear would mirror their own and maintain the balance of terror. This bizarre situation is matched only by the bizarre images in popular culture that helped to shape their faith.

1. For a perceptive study of why this claim is incorrect see Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1989); for another look at Air Force mentality during the Vietnam War that reaches similar conclusions see Earl H. Tilford, Jr., *Crosswinds: The Air Force's Setup in Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993).
2. Frank Harvey, "Those Half-Pint A-Bombers," *Saturday Evening Post* (5 November 1955): 127.

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